

**“It’s not what’s intended, but it’s what happens”:
Young women’s participation in Sport for Development and Peace in
Colombia and the complexity of gender relations**

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Abstract

For women in Colombia playing sports was taboo for years. However, through Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organizations, new spaces for female participation have emerged in recent decades. My research questions how girls and young women's participation in a Colombian SDP organization shapes and constrains gender relations. This research includes six months of ethnographic fieldwork. Sixty interviews and many observations of participant's engagement were conducted in two distinct, low socio-economic neighborhoods where the SDP organization operates. My findings show female SDP participants are challenging gender roles in Colombia. The challenges were done in subtle and sometimes more overt ways with varying degrees of success; often rife with tensions and contradictions. Drawing from a decolonial feminist perspective and using an intersectional/entangled approach, this thesis explores the processes and mechanisms – gendered socialization, accessing alternative femininity, a constrained social bubble – that delimit girls and young women's participation and perhaps invalidate steps toward social transformation. I argue that although more girls and young women are participating in masculine labeled pursuits, there are critical limitations to social change and female participants demonstrate the coloniality of gender in action. This research offers an in-depth focus on some of the complex and contradictory workings of gender within a sporting context, in Colombia. It also broadly raises some pressing concerns for scholars of gender and sport. Specifically, it calls for more researchers to apply a decolonial approach and for the SDP industry to be decolonized.

Statement of Originality

I, Sarah Oxford, declare that the PhD thesis titled “‘It’s not what’s intended, but it’s what happens’: Young women’s participation in Sport for Development and Peace in Colombia and the complexity of gender relations’ is no more than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliographies, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.



Sarah Oxford

15 February 2018

Statement of Authority of Access

I, Sarah Oxford, author of this thesis titled “It’s not what’s intended, but it’s what happens”: Young women’s participation in Sport for Development and Peace in Colombia and the complexity of gender relations’, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, agree that this thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying and communication in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Acknowledgements

Working on a Ph.D. is one of the most bizarre psychological undertakings one can pursue. There is a fine line between pleasure and pain. We Ph.D. students live on this line, wobbling back and forth with little awareness of where we physically stand. As we learn the rules of the changing academic system, we battle between being geniuses or ignoramuses, in bursts. Sometimes we are feeling like the prior and often are feeling like the latter. In reality we may be neither. Spending days reading and writing about personally enthralling topics is an utter luxury. Ask Ph.D. students how many times they have been so totally engrossed in their work that at 2:00 p.m. they continued to write while wearing their pajamas. This is not an experience everyone can relate to but it's one Ph.D. students know well. Those disgusting days are disturbingly exhilarating. Although the Ph.D. experience often feels isolating, for me, it was not. I'd like to say thank you to my community of researchers, writers and family who helped me maintain my balance on the fine Ph.D. line.

In 2012, I gave a presentation at the Bill Huntley Memorial Peace Seminar hosted by the University of Bradford and Rotary International. At the end of my presentation Professor Jim Whitman pulled me aside and asked if I'd considered pursuing a Ph.D. Although I had a research topic in mind, I never thought I was *that* kind of a student; he insisted I was. The internal imaginary fire often needs external ignition in terms of confirmation. I thank Jim for believing in me, but more importantly for telling me he did. Jim planted an idea in my head and I began asking every Ph.D. student I knew for Ph.D. advice. Common responses beyond securing funding included having passion for the research topic, being totally committed, and finding a supportive supervisor.

Near the end of my Ph.D. journey, I now preach these suggestions myself, putting emphasis on the final one. In terms of my academic supervision, I won the golden ticket. I have nothing but gratitude for my principal supervisor, Professor Ramón Spaaij. For four years, he's been critical, honest, compassionate and empathetic. But more than that, when it comes to personal development, he walks the walk. He has invited me to publish, present and teach with him when I was unsure of my abilities; he has encouraged me to explore theories beyond his expertise; and he has supported me in applying for grants that would permit me to translate my work into the Australian landscape. Thank you, Ramón. In addition, my secondary supervisor, Professor Hans Westerbeek has also been instrumental, particularly with asking me big next step questions and ensuring me that I am on the right path. And, thank you to my external supervisor, Dr. Ruth Jeanes, who has encouraged me to publish with her and given me great encouragement throughout the Ph.D. process. I would be remiss not to give a special thanks to the Sport, Diversity and Social Change reading group, including Dr. Fiona McLachlan, Dr. Brent McDonald and my fellow Ph.D. students who have been an excellent resource for deep and shallow thinking, controversial discussion and lots of laughter.

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Preface

This research began when I entered my first football (soccer) team at age nine, joining a generation of middle-class girls in the United States, whose parents had responded to the Title IX amendment by signing their daughters up to practice twice a week and compete on weekends. It developed in my teenage years while being raised in North Carolina, a place that continues to be racially segregated and class divided. I discovered more when I left NC to attend a multi-cultural and thought provoking (feminist-leaning) boarding school outside Washington D.C. The teachers and my classmates there challenged my thinking, shaping my perspective to look at our global systems as complex and my place within them as possibly complicit. In response I sought ways to make better decisions about my actions while using my privilege to advantage others too.

In my 20s I felt a calling to a career in international development within the NGO sector, but I was disappointed by power relations and the encroaching, so-called neoliberal agenda. Working in Cameroon, I questioned how do we create and sustain social change? Perplexed by noticing how much I appreciated living in a system that placed community before the individual, I often asked, what is positive social change? Who benefits from development? I suppose one could argue I was a sociologist with anthropological leanings from the start.

Sitting on the river bank in Kilifi, Kenya during my Master's fieldwork, I asked myself, how might young women's participation in football – a traditionally masculine pursuit – transform gender relations in a local community? I emailed my friend, Alexandra Moore, who also worked in international development and she responded,

“That’s a Ph.D.” Frustrated by the international development industry and overarching power systems that I saw at play within Cameroon and the slums outside Nairobi, I convinced myself a Ph.D. was a good goal to pursue. When I began my Ph.D., I didn’t know about decolonial theory, but I had a handful of questions: What processes and mechanisms support or deny any potential transformation in social relations? How might communities of practice be shaped by regularly observing girls play? What aspects of girls’ participation could be a sticking point for encouraging social change? How are local interactions shaped by national and global shifts in gender relations and vice versa?

Answering these questions required exploring powerful historical social structures and social forces that continue to shape and constrain individual agency and current day gender relations. When I stumbled upon the decolonial approach in an effort to read more Colombian academic perspectives, I realized I had gone down a rabbit hole. Applying a decolonial approach required extensive self-reflection, reading more articles in Spanish, watching YouTube videos from decolonial thinkers presenting at conferences in South America, and a second and more nuanced analysis of my data. It led to a six-month extension and many late nights pondering appropriation. It required avoiding prioritization of one social identity over another, while considering gender, class, race and sexual orientation as entanglements and simultaneously problematic to various degrees, when looking at diverse social oppressions. Finally, I needed to listen to a range of diverse voices, both in the field and in literature, and regularly reflect upon my own ontological perspective and position of power. In this thesis I have attempted to pluralize epistemologies to not reproduce coloniality. When implementing decolonial thinking, I wanted to draw attention to the spaces where coloniality is enduring and being

reproduced. If this is done, then we can begin to reveal the mechanisms by which decoloniality can foster change – even if only, for now, in the imagination.

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Section 1 – Setting the stage

Chapter 1

WAYS OF BEING

An introduction to sport and gender in Colombia

In 2005, to counteract Colombia's image as a nation marred by decades of internal conflict and cocaine trafficking, President Álvaro Uribe appropriated Gabriel García Márquez's¹ literary style, magical realism, to re-sell Colombia to the neo-liberal world through a commercial campaign *Colombia es pasión* (Colombia is passion). Despite Marquez's exalted public status as one of the most significant writers of the 20th century and Uribe's marketing goals, the mainstream hegemonic passion driving this post-conflict, coffee-producing nation is neither Marquez's work nor the nation's geographic diversity. Unquestionably, it is football and beauty pageants. Although neither subject is the direct topic of this thesis, both are national symbols and critical components of Colombia's gender binary. In generic, reductionist terms, football and beauty pageants symbolize, maintain and reproduce hegemonic gender in Colombia as men are expected to exude masculinity through the world game and women to display spectacular femininity² by objectifying their bodies.

¹ Gabriel García Márquez's literary fame was cemented with a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. His artistic style of magical realism is acclaimed for questioning reality while depicting the supranatural as normal. This style is particularly useful for exploring political subversion and introducing the reader to alternative ideas about reality.

² Drawing on McRobbie's (2008) theory of post-feminism, Giraldo (2016b) defines spectacular femininity as an idea which arose in the 21st century as a dominant feature in mainstream post-feminist Colombian culture, whereby to become a "successful" woman, women intentionally sexually objectify themselves and perpetually work to become unattainably beautiful and "visible." Beauty, a critical element of Colombian womanhood, is closely tied to wealth (class), whiteness (race) and heterosexuality (sexuality).

These social and cultural ways of being are historical – which means they have been shaped by macro forces like religion and politics. For example, colonialism and the Roman Catholic Church established the dominant forms of gender as practiced in the 21st century. Male-centric, heterosexual domination became the pillar of social organizing, and the idealized performance of masculinity and femininity became intertwined with individual and family reputation (Sanabria, 2007). Although gender performativity in Colombia includes hegemonic (and violent) masculinity, and spectacular femininity, like elsewhere, gender roles and norms in Colombia are not static and have changed over time. Although there is much social pressure to adhere to the gender binary, the reality – much to the Catholic conservatives' dismay, – is that a one size fits all gender box does not exist. The focus of this research is young women participating in community sport, – young women not represented in the mainstream discussions and discourse, and possibly experiencing an alternative way of being and belonging in Colombia.

Sport in Colombia is socially reserved as a masculine pursuit. Generally speaking, Colombian girls are not encouraged to play sport due to gendered roles that idealize girls and women as “delicate” and reserve sport as an activity for boys (Velez, 2009). However, a door for girls' participation in sport was left ajar in the mid-1990s when organizations that applied sport as a specific method to address and resolve challenges in marginalized communities proliferated and allowed girls to participate. Coalter (2009) describes this development approach as ‘plus sport’, whereby social issues are at the fore of the programming and sport is applied as the method to resolve them. Sport for Development (SFD) is the dominant term identifying plus sport activities, whereas Sport

for Development and Peace (SDP) refers to the broader sector and diverse development focused organizations that implement SFD initiatives (Darnell, 2012).

SDP organizations target youth labeled as vulnerable or disadvantaged, and recruit them to participate in team-based or unstructured play and physical activity that includes an educational curriculum tailored for various issues the participants face such as conflict resolution or income generation. The community focus and accessible programming of this development approach includes low operating expenses, adaptability to location, and social inclusivity. SDP garnered public endorsement and financial backing from institutions including the United Nations (UN, 2013).

Inside and outside Colombia, the sports arena is predominantly a bastion of male privilege, so female participation frequently challenges the dominant male hegemony.³ Findings from research conducted in the United States and England suggest girl's and women's entrance into sport has the potential to create a reconceptualization of the social construction of the feminine (Anderson, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Messner, 2007) and organized sport has emancipatory potential for women (Cahn, 1995). While researchers, SDP organizations and donors speculate that this creative development approach may empower female participants and is advancing gender equality (Brady et al., 2007; Tranfaglia, 2014), academics argue that sports programs operating within an international

³ While writing this thesis, following popular culture on this topic became an obsession easily fulfilled. All sporting roles (participating, coaching, owning, refereeing) are pursued by women today. Girls' and women's success in the sporting arena is not appreciated in and of itself, but regularly considered an anomaly in comparison to boys, or peripheral to men. One example illustrating the parents' reactions is in a New York Times article: concerning a girl's football team winning a boys' football league championship in Spain. When female athletes are interviewed, it is commonplace to discuss being a woman in a man's environment and to read special kudos from the female athlete to male "gatekeepers" for allowing or encouraging women be "tomboys" and to play. These examples demonstrate that sporting spaces continue to be de facto male space, with the exception of specific "female" identified sports (e.g. roller derby, netball and cheerleading). Gendered space is explored in chapter 7 and gendered sport is addressed in chapters 9 and 10.

development context that include girls have yet to be adequately researched from a gender perspective (Chawansky and Hayhurst, 2015; Hayhurst, 2011; Hayhurst et al., 2014; Meier, 2005; Saavedra, 2009).

Gender is receiving much attention within sports studies and sports programs (Chawansky and Hayhurst, 2015), but there is little evidence beyond anecdotal speculation to support claims of success in SDP (e.g., Coalter, 2013). In the context of development practice, SDP's 20 years of existence is relatively new. Until now, the time period to conduct research about SDP participants' experiences over an extended period of time and possible transformation in the local community has been insufficient. And, research on gender and SDP was predominantly limited to organizations based in Africa.

This research aims to fill a gap between theory and application, while adding to the SDP discourse, by providing data from participants who have been involved for an extended period of time. It also draws on South American data. Implementing organizations will have opportunities to learn more and improve their approaches, using new research and evidence of SDP work. Government, development and donor organizations will have more information to advance their understanding of the communities, contexts and issues of social justice that support motivations for implementing and funding SDP programming and development projects. A better understanding of the complexity of gender relations and new ways to promote gender equality provides empirically grounded research for sociology, gender studies, international development, and sports studies.

Combating social inequalities is important. Fundamental flaws exist in the dominant mainstream liberal feminist methods of including girls and women as

sideshows in masculine structures and then teaching them to be empowered as second-class citizens. This approach fails to fully appreciate how deeply colonialism and its conjoined daughters, capitalism and modernity are implicated in the creation and reproduction of gender inequality. Through sociological analysis, this thesis tries to contribute to the gender and sport discourses by including girls and young women omitted from mainstream debate, and by contextualizing their experiences within the global gender context. Using an SDP organization as the research lens with a decolonial feminist framework, the mechanisms and processes stimulating and constraining social relations will be investigated, to answer to what extent girls and young women's participation in SDP has shaped or constrained gender relations within the participating Colombian communities.

To explore the gendered nature of sport and the extent of its transformation since girls and young women's *inclusion*⁴ (approximately a twenty-year period), six months of ethnographic research was conducted in two distressed urban neighborhoods (three months in each). These locations are places where institutionalized racism led to violence becoming a constant in the lives of local residents.⁵ The bulk of interviews and observations were with Colombians who identify as parents, students, laborers, taxi drivers and social workers, but who are socially and politically stigmatized as *gamines*⁶ and gangsters, and statistically qualify as the 28 percent of Colombians living below national poverty lines (World Bank, 2016). Throughout this thesis, through narrative

⁴ Inclusion here is italicized to emphasize a generic interpretation of the term because female participants experienced and continue to experience social ostracism in sport. For more, see chapters 9 and 10.

⁵ The communities in this research are identified in the local media and in research publications for having high levels of measurable violence, which will be explored to contextualize the lives of interlocutors in this thesis. It is also important to note, however, that love and care also exists in these communities, though it is not highlighted or recognized in a measurable way in Western liberal research (Grosfoguel and Hira, 2016).

⁶ Gamine, or street urchin, is a colloquial derogatory term for a homeless or poor child.

analysis, the stories of young women and the people who surround them will be explored, exposing the role of SDP in relationship to the normalization and reproduction of inequality.

To my awareness, SDP research has not included a decolonial approach in theoretical analysis. This thesis intentionally draws from academics established in Latin American scholarship, such as Giraldo (2015, 2016ab), Grosfoguel (2009, 2011, 2016) and Curiel (2011, 2016) as much as possible. Because the application of decolonial options⁷ in research to date is largely theoretical, this thesis presents information to document and provide examples of lived realities: they demonstrate the extent to which macro social relations are embedded and reproduced within micro and meso social relations, to the detriment of the research subject.

The Corpus

The thesis will unfold as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the research context. This requires exploring Colombian history and specifically unpacking colonialism and the colonality of power. Chapter 3 introduces the research neighborhoods providing historical context and data concerning living standards and everyday challenges of survival. Football, an important cultural practice, is then sociologically explored, which leads me to unpack the SDP movement internationally and within Colombia. The chapter concludes by introducing VIDA, the SDP organization that is considered the community of practice in this research.

⁷ The term “decolonial options” is used frequently in decolonial discussion, particularly by Walter D. Mignolo (2012) who argues that “modernity” was defined and reproduced by those who benefit from it and is sold to the masses as the only option, which is not true as the modern option depends on the colonial power matrix. Delinking is seen as an alternative to modernity. The two most prominent trajectories include de-westernization and decoloniality. The latter is applied in this thesis.

In Chapter 4, I address the theoretical framework. Identifying the lack of Colombian and borderline thinkers as problematic in Western writing, I commit to drawing from Latina voices as much as possible throughout the thesis. Exploring gender in Colombia, I draw from predominantly Colombian and borderline thinkers. Recognizing the complexity of Colombia's history, multicultural population and political economy, the theory of intersectionality is considered and discussed as an important contribution. However, I draw from Grosfoguel's (2016) theory of differentiated intersectionalities/entanglements as an approach in this research. The chapter concludes with an exploration of decolonial theory and a personal investment into decolonial feminism, which results in the application of a decolonial feminist framework.

Chapter 5 focuses on methodology and methods. It begins by exploring the critical importance of qualitative research, before defending Colombia as an ideal location for this research. Next it investigates the research design and methods, identifying the strengths of ethnography and exploring indicators of transformation(s). In this same section, I then probe topics such as the interview process, participant observation and ethics, to name a few. This chapter extends into Chapter 6, a space to expose my social positioning as a researcher, and to consider potential bias and ontological/epistemological weaknesses. Here, I discuss my experience in Colombia as a researcher and my journey into the SDP field.

Chapters 7 through 11 critically explore the gendered nature of sport in Colombia, asking how cultural experiences of physicality are gendered, but are potentially changing in this context and how this may shape power relations. To do this, I use narratives that combine observations with interview material with the goal of providing the reader with a

detailed image of the participant and local context. In addition, I introduce topics in an intentional order to allow the reader to build on his or her contextual knowledge and to digest and make sense of the entanglements of competing oppressions and the complexities of Colombian culture.

For example, chapter 7 begins with an exploration of the local context. Upon arrival at both locations I noticed very few girls were playing: a problem when considering I was asking about the potential connections between girls' participation and social transformations. To give the reader context and to answer the question, where are the girls? I address recent research on the role of "safe space" within SDP. The research shows that the social inclusion of young women in traditionally male sporting spaces may shift who can comfortably access and shape public space. Framing safe space as a social construction and a dynamic process, I then explore the complexities and contradictions involved in the creation of safe space. I argue that while the organization's ability to adapt to change and resign control makes it accessible to the local community and therefore able to cultivate safe space, the vulnerable positioning of the organization and participants simultaneously permits the continuation of gendered space, and is a reason few girls participate.

From there I asked which girls can play and why can they play. In chapter 8, I speak to parents and participants, and compare the specific reasons that encouraged the girls and young women to attend VIDA. I address themes of social change within micro and meso social relations, particularly the issues of escaping violence, swapping traditional gender roles in the home, and opportunity. Although more girls and women are participating in masculine pursuits than ever before, I conclude this chapter by

analyzing the critical limitations of social change and the how female participants are demonstrating the coloniality of gender in action.

I continue down the path of social barriers in chapter 9 by exploring gendered cultural practices in the context of sport – specifically connecting language, socialization and participation. In first section, I question if gendered language leads to gender-based socialization. I then delve into interlocutors' responses to gendered games and actions, and question how gendered socialization is manifested into sport participation and adulthood. This topic guides the reader to consider the relationship between social stigma and spectacular femininity.

In Chapter 10, I dive into the Colombian beauty trope unpacking the idea of spectacular femininity and gender performativity in relation to girl's discouragement from playing sport (including VIDA). I argue the young women at VIDA display an ambivalent position towards femininity and practice implicit feminism, which challenges gender norms. Then I question how these young women are negotiating gender through their complex and limited participation in VIDA. The reveal shows that despite their feelings of agency and a creation of a “new” normal within their social circle, evidence demonstrates traditional social structures continue to maintain the gender status quo. Finally, asking interlocutors about changes in gender roles in the past compared to the present, in chapter 11, I address social change in relation to girls' participation in sport and the concept of non-linear social change as presented in this research.

Taking the indicators of transformation(s) and findings into consideration, in chapter 12, I will answer to what extent young women's participation in a SDP organization shapes and constrains gender relations in the local community, by exploring

the processes and mechanisms that have unfolded throughout this research. Examining where theory meets praxis, I discuss learnings that can be gleaned from this research for the Colombian SDP organization analyzed, the SDP community and researchers involved with SDP research, and those who engage with decolonial feminism. Finally, I conclude this thesis by considering future research and implications. Context is required and I begin with Colombia's complex history.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A brief history of Colombia

A comprehensive historical account of Colombia lies outside the scope of this research, but the subject matter necessitates the reader to have a general awareness of historical context and patterns. This chapter will briefly address the production of Spanish colonialism in Colombia to expose the reader to examples of the underlying logic of colonialism, termed coloniality. This historical account will be presented in two sections: Colonialism and Coloniality of Power. The focus of this thesis is gender relations, but details on gender within this section are limited because gender theory will be specifically addressed in chapter 4 and data presented in section two will be analyzed through a decolonial feminist lens.

Colonialism

From the fifteenth century through the seventeenth century, Spain, under the rule of the Habsburg Monarchy⁸, unabashedly sought the accumulation of precious resources like gold and favorable trade to maximize their wealth and attain economic self-sufficiency. The solution to their quest: colonialism. Colonialism is the practice of acquiring control over others by occupying land with settlers and exploiting both people and resources.

⁸ The House of Hapsburg is one of the most powerful dynasties to have reigned in Europe. They held power across various nation-states from the 1400s -1800s and in Spain from 1500s-1700s. They were known for their close connection to the Holy Roman Empire, lavish spending and extensive influence across the world because of dynastic marriages (which included cousin marriage).

In the early 1500s, three million indigenous people inhabited the geographical area posteriorly labeled Colombia. Amerindian groups formed a complex political landscape that included “state-like polities, tribute-collecting chiefdoms, and simple agricultural and semi-sedentary groups” (Mahoney, 2010, p. 105). Inequality within Amerindian governance systems, such as paying tribute and power hierarchies, predated colonialism (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 243). Spain deemed groups with an organized polity easier to colonize compared to hunter-gather nomadic groups. Complex Amerindian governing systems that collected tax and used labor identified to Spain a potential in economic returns (Mahoney, 2010). The combination of the complex governing systems operating in Colombia and access to gold resulted in Colombia becoming a semi-peripheral colony of Spain.

Although aspects of Spain’s governing systems were not completely foreign to Amerindian groups, the exploitative application of these systems was. Spain’s systematic abuse of peoples coupled with European diseases decimated the indigenous populations in Colombia (Viveros Vigoya and Gil Hernández, 2006). The ramification of community destabilization was far reaching as people lost community protection. For example, Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López (2017) write, “Indigenous women had to navigate a world where community protections against rape and abuse suddenly disappeared and Spanish men held extraordinary power over their and their children’s lives” (p. 243). In addition to a loss in community and security, Amerindians and African slaves could not fully participate in centers of commerce and key governing institutions. They were restricted on trade, property ownership, economic pursuits, and political participation (Mahoney, 2010).

By the 1560s, 90 percent of the indigenous population had died (Mahoney, 2010). The remaining 300,000 people survived the destabilization of their communities. Relocation programs and population collapse resulted in scattered communities, lost cultural identity and lost knowledges; “the dwindling populations then became intertwined with the Spanish population, driving high rates of miscegenation” (Mahoney, 2010, p. 107). By the mid-1600s, the growth of the settler population and institutionalized ways of life stemming from the metropolis such as Christianity, Spanish festivals, entertainment and markets revealed the extent of Spain’s influence and authority (Mahoney, 2010). In the late 17th century new discoveries of gold encouraged new settlements to be created and because of the diminishing indigenous populations, the exploitation of Africans through slave labor expanded. Colonial expansion, the import of African slaves and the various indigenous groups occupying Colombia’s distinct landscapes, resulted in a diverse populace.

Systematic destabilization: the creole elite and the other

A social classification system based on “explicit, juridical hierarchies” underpinned colonial rule (Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 245). The system “separated people into corporate groups, including Moors, Jews, conversos (Jews forcibly converted to Catholicism), blacks, Indians, persons of mixed caste, and vecinos” (Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 245).⁹ These hierarchical classifications were mediated by the Crown and an individual’s “citizenship” in the colonial world was not prescribed by law “but on a variable set of legal structures that applied or did not apply to different persons” (Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 245). Structural discrimination

⁹ Vecinos were non-indigenous people, with a racial status closer to white; they had distinct political privileges and status.

abetted extensive stigmatization. The Spanish created “a series of stigmatized processes” whereby “[t]he features of Amerindian and African populations and their descent were constructed as the negative of those supposedly characterizing the Spanish conquistadors” (Viveros Vigoya and Gil Hernández, 2006, p. 565).

The Declaration of Colombia’s independence from Spain occurred in 1810, but the transition of power and pursuit of democracy did not eliminate 300 years of Spanish colonial rule – cultural dominance and socialization – that had been embedded within the population’s psyche (Viveros Vigoya and Gil Hernández, 2006). Spanish social structures and regulations were hardly affected: slavery became more severe, laws were enacted to abolish indigenous land reservations, and elites refused to distribute the tax burden. The logic of social hierarchy continued with two distinct groupings: the powerful mercantilist “Europeanized” elite and subordinate ethnic “non-Europeanized” *others* (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 92; Mahoney, 2010).

The lineage of Colombian Europeanized creole elites is broadly traced to two groups: *encomenderos* and merchants (Mahoney, 2010). These groups directly benefited from the mineral economy, commerce and colonial policy. Encomenderos received an *encomienda*, a grant directly from the Crown granting men the right to “collect tribute, paid in labor and in goods, from a specific Indian group” (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 97). Often encomenderos were granted land from Spain, which men “invested in arable farming and cattle ranching in various regions [and their] estates generated food, luxury crops (e.g., wine, tobacco and sugar), and inputs for basic manufactures (e.g., wool and cotton)” (Mahoney, 2010, p. 109). Merchants profited even

more from colonial institutionalization as they were connected to both wholesale markets and political authorities in Bogotá (Mahoney, 2010).

The structural social divisions created during colonialism and re-established after independence continue to maintain difference in present day Colombia with the creole elite firmly positioned at the helm (Viveros Vigoya and Gil Hernández, 2006). Elites are known to practice nepotism through *roscas*, exclusive informal groups with representatives from various elite families/positions across city, region and nation that make decisions for the country. Mahoney (2010) argues:

These “statist” regulations have major distributional consequences, providing rents to certain groups and denying privileges to others. The principal beneficiaries are an aligned set of political and economic elites, the latter including monopolistic merchants and wealthy landed classes. These elites sit atop and actively uphold a rigidly hierarchical society in which the vast majority cannot advance. (p. 21)

Put differently, “the ingrained rhythms of a colonial world divided between those who gave orders and those subjected to forced labor have been carried across long generations” (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 243).

This section on colonialism introduced the reader to the violent and oppressive enactments that occurred between 1500 and 1800. It specifically identified the structural stratification systems that continue to socially organize Colombian citizens in present

time. The next section will explore examples of how the logic that underpinned colonialism continues to flourish in Colombia.

Coloniality of Power

Quijano (2000) argues racial categories constructed by colonizers automatically sanctified the white-Spanish conquistador, constituting the 'colonial difference'. The colonial difference is the distinction of groups of people within a social system arbitrarily designed by those in power to suppress the *other*. Coloniality is the logic that underpinned colonialism; it is the "symbolic, therefore invisible and indelible traces of the colonial experience" (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 55). Coloniality of power is the living legacy of social discrimination that is now normative in contemporary society. There are two critical elements to understanding the coloniality of power in Colombia specific to this research: the reproduction cultural hegemony and political violence.

Maintaining cultural hegemony: racism and class discrimination

The theory of cultural hegemony derives from Marxist thought. It is the manipulation of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class through the reproduction of a dominant ideology (e.g., cultural moors, values, knowledges). Colombia's population is heterogeneous, made up of people who identify as white-skinned Spanish decedents, Amerindians, Afro-Colombians, and mestizos (racially mixed). Although the majority of Colombians identify as mestizo (estimated 70 percent), since the introduction of race/ethnicity by Spanish colonizers, white heterosexual males have strategically

maintained a position of power and privilege that is underpinned and maintained through being white, modern and civilized (Viveros Vigoya, 2013).

The maintenance of cultural hegemony allows for the continuation of social stigma established during colonialism, which Viveros Vigoya and Gil Hernández (2006) argue, “caused severe representational effects” for Amerindian and Afro-Colombians who continue in present day to be represented as “lazy, savage, superstitious, libidinous, and unable to overcome poverty” (p. 565).¹⁰ Social stigma is emboldened through *colombianidad*. Colombianidad is the essence of being Colombian. In addition to policy, cultural production and social hierarchy, colombianidad shapes Colombia’s cultural hegemony (Giraldo, 2016b). Colombianidad includes a race/gender/sex logic that includes ‘white’ skin, Catholic gender roles¹¹, the condemnation of homosexuality, and political/ideological beliefs centered on the pledge to modernity (Giraldo, 2016b).

Due to the relationship between whiteness and power, and wealth and beauty, “afro-descendants and indigenous peoples have been consistently positioned at the bottom,” othered and limited to peripheral spaces as elites consider their mere existence a risk to “hinder development and full entry into modernity” (Giraldo, 2015, p. 647). Race/ethnicity in Colombia is connected to social class and to some extent is uniquely malleable. For example, Wade (2010) notes that “in Latin America individuals will be classified on the white-black colour scale according to whether they are dressed shabbily

¹⁰ The ramifications of these stigmas are far reaching, Viveros Vigoya and Gil Hernández (2006) write: [T]he stain of extreme economical, juridical and social marginalization, political and military domination, slavery and subjection of groups descending from indigenous and African ethnic groups did not vanish with social reforms brought by independence and the ensuing processes of democratization – even less with capitalistic economic development. On the contrary, the internationalization of the economy consolidated these groups’ health deficit, conditions of inequality, and exclusion from access to information and health services...” (p. 565).

¹¹ The Catholic Church holds significant influence in Colombian society as 90 percent of Colombians identify as Catholic (Moreno, Herazo, Oviedo, & Campo-Arias, 2015). And, the powerful Catholic Church is in cahoots with allies in the Conservative party (Giraldo, 2016b).

or smartly, which means that economic status influences racial classifications” (p. 39). As a result, a phenomenon called *blanqueamiento*, or whitening, occurs:

Blanqueamiento works along the axes of race and class, and concerns both phenotypical and behavioural issues: by becoming whiter the individual not only invokes his/her desire for phenotypical transformation, but also for cultural assimilation in a context of white domination. (Giraldo, 2015, p. 647)¹²

Despite a commonality in marginalized social positioning and extensive discrimination, individuals identified as *other* experience the entanglement of various social constructions that shape identity (e.g., gender, sexuality, ethnicity) differently and this results in qualitatively distinct social experiences (Grosfoguel, 2016).¹³

Institutionalized racism is entangled with Colombia's class system. The government first formally tested the social stratification system in Bogotá in the 1980s to organize and redistribute wealth among the urban population. In 1994 with the Public Service Law, 142, the government implemented the controversial system nation-wide (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008). Through this system, citizens are divided into six categories with six representing the wealthiest category. Most citizens are classified in classes one through three (estimated 70 percent in the capital, Bogotá).¹⁴ The law assigns class

¹² Since female beauty is connected to womanhood, and beauty is connected to whiteness, non-white women perform whiteness by “physically – straightening and dyeing their hair, whitening their skin – and culturally – which entails class performance” (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 88).

¹³ To read detailed historical accounts of dehumanization from various perspectives, read *The Colombia Reader: history, culture, politics* (2017) edited by Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios and Ana María Gómez López.

¹⁴ Anecdotally, class one residents live in insecure housing and financially survive day-by-day; class two citizens have secure housing, but do not have financial savings; and those identified as class three have secure housing and supplemental income for education or holidays. People within class four and higher

number through residential property, resulting in neighborhoods identified by stratum. Higher taxes paid by class five and six citizens subsidize public services for classes one through three, and class four citizens pay a standard price. Subsidies are far reaching, from utilities such as water, sewage, garbage collection and public transportation, to taxes paid in restaurants, stores and even university fees.¹⁵

The argument for implementing and maintaining the practice of a wealth redistribution system is that the root of social segregation is wealth inequality and the solution to it is wealth redistribution. There is little social interaction and much less integration among the six class groupings, which are predominately visually marked by skin color. Light-skinned descendants of Spanish colonizers occupy the wealthier ranks, whereas dark-skinned descendants of indigenous and African peoples make up the poorer classes. Rather than considering the system as a means to improve their standard of living, Colombians receiving subsidies perceive the system as a way to separate and distinguish the rich from the poor (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008). Although classism and racism operate in tandem in Colombia, the intertwined relationship is so normalized that it elusively shapes society.¹⁶

The class system evolved into a method to solidify socio-economic sub-cultures. Rodriguez Pizzaro and Ibarra Melo (2013) note a Colombian woman's socio-economic

have secure housing, second homes, can educate their children in private schools and take international holidays. People in latter categories frequent (and often live within) the pockets of Colombia's cities that are identified as modern. These areas have contemporary supermalls, expensive restaurants and modern infrastructure such as schools and public transportation. These areas are similar to Manhattan and the people within them personify Western consumerism.

¹⁵ The stratification system may be phased out in the near future for inefficiency. Wealthy individuals can skirt the system by living in slightly poorer neighborhoods (class 3); and inhabitants of class one or two areas are stigmatized because of their neighborhood.

¹⁶ For brief insight into how the class system has been internalized by citizens, see the November 9, 2017 article in The Guardian "*If I'm stratum 3, that's who I am*": inside Bogota's social stratification system. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/09/bogota-colombia-social-stratification-system>

positioning affects her “living conditions, obstacles, opportunities, knowledge, and choices” (p. 27). The reach of these social markers is profound, as they become a complex (re)production of culture, embodied and re-enacted through everyday interactions. For those in lower social classes to move higher in class ranking they would essentially be required to detach from their community and adopt the cultural ways of the “oppressive” classes.¹⁷ The combination of social segregation and a lack of access to economic and social capital limits class mobility. The cultural and social ramifications of the class system are far-reaching, as it has reified the establishment of a hierarchy of power and a cultural hegemony that includes the stigmatization/racialization/dehumanization of people identified with the lower social classes.

Grosfoguel (2016) argues that racism must be considered beyond skin color because human hierarchies of superiority and inferiority can be marked by “color, ethnicity, language, culture and/or religion” and racialization continues to occur based on the marking of select bodies as superior or inferior (p.10). This is of critical import to all research because the “imperial/capitalist/colonial system” extends beyond bodies, and as addressed above, into spaces occupied by racialized bodies. Grosfoguel (2016) distinguishes these spaces as “zone of being” versus “zone of non-being” (p.12). In the zone of non-being, residents are racialized and dehumanized as inferior and in need of being helped/fixed/emancipated. Understanding racism as a violent tool that continues to divide humans institutionally in the Global North and Global South is a necessary starting point for this research.

¹⁷ An exception to this rule was the *narco-traffickers* who quickly moved up the ladder to wealthier economic classes to become labelled *narco-bourgeoisie* without having to change their cultural identity.

Global South is a term defined by those in power, the Global North. It refers to nations the World Bank labels Low and Middle-Income. Identifiers beyond global location and economic standings include: low standard of living, low education rates, limited infrastructure, poor nutritional standards and access to water, insufficient healthcare, a high rate of disease and infant mortality, unstable political systems, significant levels of discrimination (Levermore and Beacom, 2009). These communities and spaces also exist within Global North nations. They cannot be universalized, but throughout history specific groups of people existing in these spaces have experienced institutional de-humanizing (Grosfoguel, 2016). Other commonly applied terms are West/Rest, developed/developing, one-thirds world/two-third world, and first world/third world. These concepts will be further explained in the theoretical framework found in chapter 4.

The term West/Western refers to the dominant nations in power that continue to benefit from the modern-colonial system. Specifically, I am referring to the United States of America (USA) and Western European nations. I use these terms apprehensively and sparingly and acknowledge that these terms are problematic for a few reasons: the term West erases the messiness in the relations between and among nations, peoples and cultures; second, the West, as an entity, appropriates much that it now claims as its own; and third, particularly to this thesis, the term allows for the repetition of imperial sins by rendering people and places static and then taking information from one space in the world and returning it as knowledge within the 'West' (Coetzee, 2018).

Institutional racism and social class stratification are stressed in this thesis to encourage constant reflection surrounding macro-social relations, such as: why are SDP

organizations needed to begin with? And, are SDP organizations a reasonable solution or a reactionary Western liberal-minded Band-Aid? Above I demonstrated the power of a dominant cultural hegemony and through examples of race/ethnicity and class I began to provide examples of internalized oppression. To understand how power is maintained in Colombia, the topics of political violence and displacement must be unpacked. It is to these topics I now turn.

Maintaining Power: political violence and displacement

The history of violence in Colombia and its reach is so extensive, Oslender (2008) argues, that it is embedded in the Colombian psyche:

[V]iolence runs like a red thread through the country's official history through the personal, intimate life histories of most Colombians. Everyone seems to have a story to tell about a relative blackmailed, a friend kidnapped, a neighbor shot, a colleague disappeared, or family friends driven off their lands. This is not to essentialize Colombians as a violent people but the effects of four-decades-long civil war, dirty counterinsurgency wars, and terror campaigns that expel peasants from their lands in their thousands have created a context in which violence has become an everyday cultural fact. Violence has become deeply engrained in the collective psyche and helps to define the 'being Colombian'. (p. 78)

Violence in Colombia continued after independence with numerous massacres. Giraldo (2016b) concludes that of the various kinds of violence that have been perpetuated in

Colombia, “political violence – which is also infected by gender, race, ethnicity, and social origin – is perhaps the most salient” (p. 36). Political violence underpins one of Colombia’s goriest periods (1946-1957) labeled, *La Violencia*, the violence.

The assassination of Jorge Gaitán, the Liberal leader in 1948 propelled the nation into a “virtual civil war” where “fury and hysteria swept through the city” (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 36; Guardiola-Rivera. 2010, p. 326). Gaitán, “the most popular and charismatic politician in twentieth century Colombian politics”, was an outstanding lawyer, captivating wordsmith, and socialist (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010, p.327). The proletarian classes and lower-middle-income city dwellers identified Gaitán as a hero (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010). Gaitán’s remarkable political position distinguished him from other elites:

He denounced ‘the political country’, the emerging and vaguely formed class of politicians to thrall to landowners, captains of industry, new industrialists and transitional interests, as the aloof oppressor of ‘the national country’, the rural and urban rabble, disposed of by the thousands in the myriad of civil wars invented by ‘red’ Liberals and ‘blue’ Conservatives to serve interests other than their own. (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010), p. 328)

His death provoked a mass rebellion that included Liberal leaders withdrawing from the government and intense rioting, particularly in Bogotá.

On 9 April 1948, protestors – most of whom were homeless peasants of indigenous and Afro-Latin American origin who arrived in Bogota to escape Conservative political repression in rural areas – accused the Conservative government of

Gaitán's assassination and rioted at Bolivar Square, outside the Presidential Palace (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010). Liberal leaders made internal compromises with the Conservative-led government. The government responded to the rioters with snipers and tanks, killing many. The day, known as *El Bogotazo*, "showed the upper classes the dangers represented by the urban workers invoking their memories of rural suffering, liberty and political self-sufficiency" (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010, p.330). Gaitán's death led to a decade of violence perpetrated by the Conservative government on popular classes. It gave rise to "the leftist guerrilla movements and far-right paramilitary groups 'that continue to compromise political life in the country until this very day'" (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010, p. 331). Giraldo (2016b) concurs stating:

The amalgamation of Liberal ideology with communist ideology since the forties served as an alibi to unleash extreme levels of political violence at the time and provided the context for the stigmatisation – and institutionalised persecution – of dissident thought which became a defining feature of Colombian political history for the remaining of the twentieth century as well as for the first decade and a half of the twenty-first (p. 180).

The 1940s resulted in the two separate groupings of Colombian citizens, Liberals and Conservatives, becoming even more entrenched in difference. This period led to the creation of self-defense groups and guerrilla forces such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, known internationally as FARC, as well as conservative-led paramilitary forces. In the 1960s and 1970s, the divisions of La Violencia remained

“thoroughly permeated” by the Cold War (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 4). Through the National Front agreement, political parties traded power, retaining Colombia’s democracy but not thwarting political violence.

The story above excludes an important thread, an outside player assisting with the maintenance of power. During the 1900s that role no longer belonged to Spain, but to the United States of America (USA). The USA in the interest of maintaining their post World War II position on the world stage championed free trade and anti-communism (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010). The same day of Gaitán’s assassination, at the Pan-American Conference, the USA created the Organization of American States (OAS). The OAS directly competed with the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) created months earlier. The ECLA threatened the United States’ liberal economic plans because of its autonomy and regional integration; and Gaitán represented their second fear, communist revolution (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010). As effectively as the Spanish colonized Colombia, the United States, with industrial and financial power, engaged with Colombia for economic gain and strategic free trade (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010).

This relationship continued into the 1980s, with the rise of the drug cartels. During this time paramilitary groups proliferated and united through the title Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). Funded by mafia and collaborating with the Colombian military, AUC declared war on guerrillas and their assumed supporters (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017). Although the United States did not send conquistadors like the Spanish, they did control the movement of money and dictated Colombian public policy.¹⁸ The extent was far reaching:

¹⁸ For example, through *Plan Colombia* the United States gave Colombia \$1.3 billion of which 80 percent was destined for police and military and to be implemented within two years (Stanfield, 2013, p. 222).

By the end of the twentieth century, all sides were getting their war chests from the United States, whether as ‘dirty money’ earned in the drug trade or as direct military and policy aid, which added up to nearly \$7 billion from the US government between 2000 and 2010. (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 4)

The United States had a lot of gain from its relationship with countries in Latin America. Stanfield (2013) argues the US neo-liberal agenda required the continuation of political violence and a destabilized Colombia:

Neoliberalism needed paramilitary terrorism as an instrument to impose its economic and political program while gutting the competing and contradictory goal of social inclusion and communal welfare inscribed in the constitution. This pattern was not new in Colombian history; it *was* Colombian history. (p.227)

Colombia’s history patterned with political violence and a “pro-establishment” narrative forged at the expense of the wellbeing or existence of the popular classes, demonstrates the lengths political elites will go to maintain power (Giraldo, 2016b).¹⁹ This includes

Bill Clinton dismissed Colombia’s poor human rights standards to continue the USA’s long-term rhetorical *War on Drugs*, thus fostering further violence implemented by paramilitaries.

¹⁹ For an example consider Colombia’s recent history as the most dangerous nation for trade unionists, where according to Rojas (2009) 2515 trade unionists were killed in Colombia between 1986 and 2009 (p. 234).

restricting citizens' mobilization and requiring them to flee from violence, when their land can be turned into profit.

Guardiola-Rivera (2010) argues indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities are in an "untenable position" as even when these groups work within the formalized legal system, collusion at the highest levels remains. The result is their land rights are ignored when in conflict with government economic interests: "The government conditions compensation and land return to the setting up of 'economically viable projects' that comply with its aims concerning the 'inevitable' internationalisation of the economy" (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010, pp. 36-37). In fact, most guerrilla and paramilitary violence has been "aimed at forcibly displacing peoples for the purposes of making space for short-term profitable enterprises of mining or export-oriented agriculture" (Guardiola-Rivera, 2010, p. 189). Forced displacement results in severe repercussions for the individual, family, community and society.

An Internally Displaced Person (IDP) is a person forced to flee their home but who remains within their nation's borders. Political violence resulted in more than 15 percent of Colombia's population becoming internally displaced (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López, 2017, p. 4). According to UNHCR (2016):

Internally displaced persons, or IDPs, are among the world's most vulnerable people. Unlike refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries. Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own

government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight. As citizens, they retain all of their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law.

In Colombia, most IDPs have fled from rural to urban environments seeking two things: “the security of being anonymous to avoid being targeted again; and access to public services that are inaccessible in their home municipalities” (COHA, 2015). It is common for IDPs to have observed extreme violence, lost family members, and to have no social networks in their new environment. In 1999, Mary Diaz, then Executive Director of the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, wrote to *The New York Times* editors to explain the crisis:

The vast majority of Colombia’s refugees are children, and an estimated 39 percent of displaced families are headed by women whose husbands, fathers and sons have been killed, are off fighting or seeking work. When I interviewed many such women last year, they told horror stories of watching their loved ones threatened or killed by paramilitaries. These women have been forced to move to cities, but cannot find regular work or enroll their children in school, and have difficulty finding health care. Many are turning to begging, and some to prostitution. (Diaz, 1999, n.p.)

Although the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed a peace agreement in 2016 to end the longstanding conflict, Diaz’s

statement is not dated.²⁰ Since 1985, more than 5.8 million people have registered with the national government as victims of conflict: more than 2.6 million are women and more than one million are children under 12 years of age.²¹ UNDP (2012) report that 80 percent of IDPs are women and children.

Colombia has one of the highest proportions of IDP citizens in the world. The majority of Colombian IDPs identify their race/ethnicity as indigenous or Afro-Colombian (Beittel, 2012), and according to the World Food Program (2016a), all of these citizens belong to the two lowest socio-economic classes. Vidal Lopez et al. (2011) explain the challenges IDPs face:

IDPs are often treated with hostility by the general public. They may be viewed with fear, subjected to persecution for being displaced and blamed for increased crime rates. Cultural, regional and ethnic differences often produce conflicts between the two communities and become excuses for racism and discrimination in daily life, such as in the workplace and in the landlord-tenant relationship. Furthermore, host communities often do not understand the state assistance programs for IDPs. This can lead to hostility toward IDPs and unsubstantiated accusations regarding IDPs' supposed inability to use state assistance effectively, organize themselves or overcome their present situation. (p.3)

²⁰ Under the leadership of 2016 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos, and after four years of negotiations, the Colombian government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) agreed upon a peace treaty to end the conflict that has resulted in nearly a quarter of a million people killed. Santos put the treaty to the Colombian public via a plebiscite vote. Citizens voted against the treaty by a slim margin of an estimated 60,000 votes of 13 million cast. The peace accord was then renegotiated, signed by both parties and ratified by congress.

²¹ For more information concerning numbers regarding Colombia's long-standing low-grade internal conflict, see: ¡basta ya! Colombia: Memorias de guerra y dignidad (2013), UNHCR (2016) report and Semana.com on their coverage of victims of conflict.

Guardiola-Rivera (2010) connects internal displacement to colonial social hierarchies, writing:

[P]rocesses of forced displacement...have thrown the issue of latent race and racism in the faces of urban populations accustomed to thinking of themselves as tolerant of, or at least oblivious to, racial prejudices because of their mixed or mestizo background...the late twentieth century has seen the redescription, if not the invention, of new urban social categories along the lines of access to property rights or lack thereof that are often superimposed on and still resemble older caste lines. (p. 189)

Due to their limited access to the labor market, IDPs struggle to establish a stable income; available work is usually casual, short-term gendered manual labor such as construction or domestic labor (Reference withheld).

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Food Program (2016b) reveal the extent of IDP families' challenges, identifying lack of resources:

[T]he average monthly income of an internally displaced family represents a little over 41 percent of the official minimum wage, equivalent to \$63 USD. Of this amount, displaced people spend 58 percent on food, 6 percent on health, and just 3 percent on education.

While Colombia's economy appears prosperous and continues to grow, it is highly unequal. While the rich continue to get richer new gains do not reach IDPs.

IDPs experience psychological trauma fleeing their homes, trying to navigate resources, and learning to survive in their new locations.²² And yet the processes to register as an IDP to receive government aid are arduous (Reference withheld). Without government registration and an identification card, they have limited access to healthcare and other services (education included), which results in living an extremely low quality of life (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2015; Reference withheld). Compounding the problem, many IDPs do not want to register with the government out of fear of stigmatization or becoming a target again.²³

IDPs rely heavily on local assistance provided by NGOs and the Catholic Church (Reference withheld). While IDPs desperately seek employment, many are illiterate or have skills highly suited for rural environments. Securing a job in the formal labor market comes with ramifications. When an IDP registers in the government system as a formal worker he or she loses government assistance (Reference withheld). As a result, the employer gains a great deal of power over the IDPs fragile situation. With international pressure in 2011, Santos passed the Victims Law granting IDPs "damages, restitution of prior living conditions, a range of social services, and special protections in legal proceedings" (Summers, 2012, p. 223); however, like much of the legislation addressed in this thesis, political rhetoric is common and implementation rare (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2015).

²² For more information on the history of Colombia's violence, geographies of terror and how local populations resist terror, see Ostrender (2008).

²³ One or multiple groups fighting for land and resources, including the military, paramilitaries, drug cartels and guerrillas, could have caused them to flee.

Individual human experiences overlap with the experiences of many, and the process of socialization reproduces cultural hegemony. Colombia's cultural hegemony continues to be shaped by elites and in particular the Conservative government and Catholicism. The prevailing popular consciousness consents to heteronormativity and explicit gender roles grounded in biological determinism and a strict form of spectacular femininity.²⁴ For this reason, among others, it is essential to capture information about people, like young women playing sports, who are not strictly conforming to Colombia's socially constructed femininity.

While questioning if female SDP participants' gender performativity (that is marked as abnormal) has the potential to influence other peoples' perception of what young women can accomplish and thus, their opportunities, we must continually ask: what difference does gender make? How did gender come to make a difference (McElhinny, 2003)? And, what role does sexuality play within gender relations? The social construction of gender in relation to these questions will be unpacked throughout this thesis.

The next chapter will set the research stage. It will provide details on the research locations and people who live within these neighborhoods. Historical context for football in Colombia and the creation of Colombia's Sport for Development and Peace movement follows. From there I will address the creation and status of the SDP movement

²⁴ Drawing on McRobbie's (2008) theory of post-feminism, Giraldo (2016) defines spectacular femininity as an idea which arose in the 21st century as a dominant feature in mainstream post-feminist Colombian culture, whereby to become a "successful" woman, women intentionally sexually objectify themselves and perpetually work to become unattainably beautiful and "visible." Beauty, a critical element of Colombian womanhood, is closely tied to wealth (class), whiteness (race) and heterosexuality (sexuality).

internationally, before giving context to the Colombian SDP organization used as the lens in this research.

Chapter 3

ENTERING THE FIELD

Los barrios, the people and football

The research locations, Chévere and Bacano (pseudonyms), are home to some of Colombia's most vulnerable citizens.²⁵ Citizens of these neighborhoods live in insecure overcrowded houses and work menial or *ambulante* jobs.²⁶ They endure chronic stress, which leads to high levels of depression. Many identify as internally displaced.

In both research locations, sexual and domestic violence and teen pregnancy are critical issues that assist in reproducing the poverty cycle. Psychosocial factors such as social pressures for adolescents to be sexually active (Reference withheld), masculinity's link to sexism and dominance (Reference withheld; Viveros Vigoya, 2016), and motherhood as a status symbol of womanhood, hinder efforts to break the poverty cycle (Pallitto and O'Campo, 2004). The National Department of Statistics, DANE (2011), reveals that sexual education is limited, but sexual manipulation and violence is commonplace. For example, Oxfam et al. (2011) report:

Prevalence of sexual violence during the period 2001 – 2009, based on information from 407 municipalities with presence of the Public Force, guerrilla,

²⁵ A vulnerable community in this research is one that has experienced previous or on-going conflict (disaster), and is statistically rated below the world standard in literacy, birth-rate, childhood mortality, and women's rights, typical factors that often lead to cyclical poverty. For more on vulnerability see Birkman, 2006. For more information on vulnerable communities in Colombia, see data produced by Semana: <http://www.semana.com/especiales/proyectovictimas/100-municipios-criticos/index.html>

²⁶ *Ambulante* jobs are those that are not registered with the government such as picking up garbage or organizing recycling. Women from the lower social classes tend to be housekeepers who work in neighborhoods that are class three and higher.

paramilitaries or other armed actors in Colombia – was estimated as 17.58 percent, which means that during that period of time, 489,687 women were direct victims of sexual violence. (p. 7)

Previous research conducted in and around Chévere and Bacano revealed 21 percent of girls and 14 percent of boys age 10-17 reported being victims of unwanted sexual touches; 36 percent of girls noted sexual advances or innuendo such as comments and proposals; and 6 percent of girls and 2 percent of boys reported having been raped. The study also reported that around Chévere 12 percent of children had been given ‘something’ in exchange for sex whereas 21 percent had in Bacano (Reference withheld).²⁷

Sex before marriage is considered a sin in the Catholic Church and as a result sexual education in schools and at home is limited to non-existent (Daniels, 2015). Data from the 2000 Demographic and Health Survey for Colombia using a sample that consisted of 3,431 currently or previously married women aged 15 – 49 who had given birth in the last five years or were currently pregnant found that 55 percent of respondents had had at least one unintended pregnancy, and 38 percent had been physically or sexually abused by their current or most recent partner (Pallitto and O’Campo, 2004). The Colombian Family Welfare Institute (2016) reports that one in every five young Colombian women between the ages of 15 and 19 already have a child or are currently pregnant and 64 percent of these pregnancies were unplanned. More striking, 30 percent

²⁷ The connection between sex and power underpins Colombian culture in a similar vein as violence: ‘All armed actors in the Colombian conflict, that is, left-wing guerrillas, far-right paramilitaries, BACRIM (demobilized paramilitaries), and the Colombian army, are reported to have been involved in sexual violence against women (Giraldo, 2016a, p.142 drawing from ABColombia, Sisma Mujer and Colombia, 2013, p.1).

of displaced young women (age 15-19) have been pregnant at least once and 66 percent of young women living in the poorest economic classes are mothers by age 19 (Profamilia, 2002). Consequently, 50 percent of teenage girls who dropped out of school cited pregnancy as the reason (Daniels, 2015).

In 2010, Colombia's government created the National Commission for the Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Rights to combat teenage (and childhood) pregnancy. However, combating the cultural norm of teenage pregnancy within a culture that is heavily influenced by the Catholic Church and has socially constructed womanhood to coincide with motherhood is no small task. A poll conducted by *Revista Semana* in 2012 revealed the current generation aligns with traditional, conservative values typified by older generations; at astounding rates they oppose marriage equality (58 percent), abortion (76 percent), and the legalization of drugs (75 percent) (Giraldo, 2016a, p. 126).²⁸ Abortion is illegal excepting specific circumstances – rape, genetic malformation, or the mother's life being at risk – but in 2008 alone, 400,400 illegal abortions were conducted (Prada, Singh, Remez, & Villarreal, 2011). In 2010, Congress passed a law to provide free condoms and female birth control through the health system. As a result, birth control has become more “commonplace” among women already in committed relationships, but access for the unwed is questionable due to social stigma held among a widely Catholic population (Daniels, 2015).

The two locations researched are considered low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Each is regularly highlighted in the news for anti-social behavior and guerrilla and

²⁸ In 2016, the Catholic Church and ultra-conservative groups organized mass protests against gender ideology. The protest was in response to the FARC/Santos negotiations recognized for addressing gender based violence during the conflict, ensuring political participation of women and LGBTI groups and not providing amnesty to perpetrators of gender based crimes (Giraldo, 2016a).

paramilitary related violence.²⁹ Although both are locations categorized as class one or two, there are major differences with regard to geography, demographics and culture, which impacts the social construction of gender. Below, the locality of Chévere will be described. Second, Bacano will be discussed.

Chévere, the city

Feeling the temperature drop signaled that I was one hour into my journey. Instinctively, I pulled my grey hood over my head and hugged my bag to my chest. My journey from where I lived to Chévere was a visual journey through Colombia's class system. During the first few minutes expensive shops and flower markets lined the streets patronized by men and women dressed immaculately in suits and heels for office jobs. As we drove south and passed through lower socio-economic neighborhoods, the picture dramatically changed as prostitutes positioned their bodies for sale in doorways, drugs were openly consumed, men defecated on street corners, and people engaged in various acts of violence. On the final stretch, a stench of urine mixed with car exhaust would pass through the bus windows encouraging nausea, but I smelled my grey shirtsleeve in defiance. We would soon enter the last bus station on the line (Field notes, Chévere, April).

Congested vehicles competed for position on the multi-lane highway that physically separates Chévere from the larger city: the poor from the rich. This mountainous (3000m) and unplanned locality is home to an estimated one million

²⁹ Throughout this text the terms gangs, guerrillas and paramilitaries are used loosely and often interchangeably. These groups maintain power and enforce customary law within distressed neighborhoods. Although these actors are distinct to interlocutors, they were not to me. My word selection is a reflection of the words used by interlocutors in interviews and casual conversation.

citizens who reside within 130 smaller neighborhoods known as *sedes*. Each sede has different challenges such as lack of resources (water and electricity) or anti-social behavior (drug and gang related). Since paramilitaries, guerrillas, and gangs regularly negotiate local authority through territories, the boundary lines between *sedes* are static in name only.

Despite Chévere's rural and spacious appearance there is little space for development. Houses overpopulated with family members from multiple generations line the steep, unstable dirt cliffs. More than 58 percent of the population lives in insecure housing (Reference withheld) and single parent households are common with one in three headed by a woman (Profamilia, 2002). The absence of urban planning has resulted in limited economic opportunity and inadequate infrastructure. Roads are narrow and steep, encouraging frequent vehicle collisions. Buses are irregular and overcrowded, causing stress for the many residents who travel into the city center for work.

Although in 2012 President Santos made primary and secondary education free, schools in this locality are economically disadvantaged and overcrowded. During my first three weeks of research, teachers were on strike, resulting in children en masse roaming the neighborhood without supervision. Even with subsidized tuition, many parents cannot afford school uniforms or books, and often need children to assist at home. There are an estimated 1.1 million child workers in Colombia, and many are forced into child gangs (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2015). On top of these challenges, there is little reprieve from the punitive sun at this elevation; and the cold and rain can be unrelenting, turning the area into a mud pit. Environmental conditions become an added challenge for residents who have resettled from warmer climates.

Colombians living in rural areas began emigrating to Chévere in the 1950s. Many fled to cities seeking economic opportunities, however, most were rural displaced farmers fleeing violence perpetuated by the fighting between guerrillas, government troops, paramilitaries and cocaine warlords. Whatever their reason was for leaving, these citizens could not afford urban housing costs. They began settling in the area, creating an informal settlement. In the 1960s and 1970s the national government began investing in the area by providing limited infrastructure and public services, and in the 1980s the government officially registered and named the area Chévere. Daniela Maria, a woman in her 60s who arrived as an IDP in 1990 and has lived in Chévere for 25 years, noted how the area has changed:

Well because at that time there were no [playing] fields, there were no houses or anything like that, there were no buses, there was nothing, there was nothing, everyone was sleeping in black fabric houses [tents]...When did the neighborhood begin to change? People began to purchase blocks and to remove the black fabric. They began to organize the neighborhood and to give us services because before we had to walk to [sede] to get water and we had to wash there.

Residents of Chévere hail from all regions of the country, creating an extremely diverse resident population. Almost half of the city's IDP population has settled in Chévere over the past 25 years (Reference withheld). Although many of the community's citizens share the common experience of being internally displaced, limited resources and housing create tensions between newly arriving IDPs and "host" community members.

Host community members are residents who have been in the community for at least ten years (Reference withheld). They have better access to resources and understand local processes, but due to socioeconomic factors, their lives continue to be fraught with stress and violence. In a study conducted about IDP residents in the Chévere area, 86 percent of participants interviewed expressed feeling some form of depression and anxiety (Reference withheld).³⁰ In comparison to host members, IDPs typically have few social networks and limited access to employment. In all areas of their lives, IDPs are grappling. At first, support may be given, but due to residents' limited resources, the extension of the metaphorical olive branch is short-lived. The neighborhoods are also home to many demobilized members of illegal armed groups, compounding the situation by placing perpetrators and victims within close proximity without security.

In addition to tension and stress within micro and meso social relations, residents regularly experience violence organized by contesting local authorities (e.g., local police, paramilitary groups, guerrillas, and gangs). The last available census from 2002 shows that 70 percent of the population in Chévere is under the age of 26 (Profamilia, 2002). Demographics from the entire nation reveal that 41 percent of Colombians remain under 25 (CIA World Factbook, 2018). Although data is unavailable, it can be assumed that Chévere's population remains young because family planning services are less accessible than those for the general (wealthier) population and it is these citizens who make up the third of Colombia's population who live under the poverty line.

Many interlocutors spoke of the commonplace danger for teenage boys to be recruited and chastised by local groups fighting for power and prestige (e.g., Marco,

³⁰ International research on students in low-income communities shows that high stress levels impact decision-making and is connected to depression (Pauille, 2014).

previous participant; Carlos, volunteer). Police rarely enter specific sedes of Chévere. One interview participant presumed they were paid to stay away. The few times I observed police in the area, they entered in large numbers and their entry appeared to be a well-orchestrated event:

We were playing at the micro pitch near the high school in the afternoon when 10 motorcycles with 20 cops showed up. They wore bright yellow high visibility clothing, stared at us, and frisked a 15-year-old boy who had his arm around his girlfriend. It was jarring. We couldn't have been more innocent playing there. The psychologist had no reaction and later told me it was normal. It's rare to see the cops in this area, when they do come, they are in large numbers and they seem to frisk everyone (Field notes, Chévere).

Due to my security and in respect to the organization's security, I could never directly ask who controlled the neighborhood and how power was divided, but I did indirectly learn about these groups in my interviews. Once the recorder was turned off one participant asked what I knew about the paramilitaries and was baffled about my lack of awareness as he stated they were a dominating presence in his life. Another participant noted that night is completely different than the day as gunshots and screams create an orchestra of sounds. Another discussed the single time she left her house after the customarily imposed 9 pm curfew that caused her to be a witness to a murder by gunshot. It is an everyday reality for the residents of Chévere to be caught between the authority of the

police, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and gangs; a circumstance that impacts their daily life and rituals.

Bacano, the coast

Green and blue lights flare around the front window when the driver hits his brakes. Slinkys hang from the ceiling, bright green and blue fabrics frame buttons, and pictures of Virgin Mary mount the bus wall. The oppressive heat forces beads of sweat from everyone's backs onto the pleather seats. Juice? Water? A man staggers through the bus selling drinks. Pollution fills my nose and the man collecting money yells at me, "do you know where you are going?" Another man yells, "do you even speak Spanish? You can't go to this neighborhood!" "I'm fine, thank you. I know where I'm going. I work here," I respond calmly. Everyone on the bus looks at me, mostly with eyes of concern. I put my sunglasses on to cover my eyes, the part of my body that solicits comments.

We slowly pass a market where everyone is buying everything. It's run-down, the street is dirt and stalls are make-shift with fabric awnings. Women are dressed in practical clothing, pants and t-shirts, no heels, little make-up. It's gritty in there and I wouldn't go alone. Outside the window I watch two men comment on the size of a woman's butt, one follows her into a store where the mannequins of women look like Barbie with breast and butt augmentation. Per usual today the bus driver bought a newspaper, another man entered selling juice, they blast loud champeta music. The bus driver and the money collector continuously check out women, sometime honking a horn or yelling. "Mami" (a flirtatious word for mom), "come to the front" yells the bus driver. He likes the looks of a girl in the back. She moves to sit directly behind him, and he

stares at her, touching his hand lightly between her breasts. He tells the man collecting money to check out her cleavage. She laughs and asks him mundane questions.

There are short-lived, heated arguments between bus drivers. I get off the bus yelling “parada” at the gas station and walk towards the office. I walk in the shade, but stay off the sidewalk and on the street so people can see me clearly. I say hello to grandmothers and children. I avoid men. The walk is probably the most dangerous part of my day. I’m the only white person and people stare. I become instantly self-conscious about my clothing. I want to wear shorts and a t-shirt since I’m playing sport, but Bacano women wear jeans and t-shirts (none of them participate). I don’t want to look wealthy (but I do because I’m white). I don’t want to dress disrespectfully either. It’s a fine and confusing line. Today a man started moving at me. He was on a motorcycle, which heightened my fear. I wondered if he was following me. He stopped his moto and turned around. I felt his gaze burn into me. I kept walking, but adjusted my speed. The more I do this walk, the more nervous I become. Something about Colombia does that to you. I walk into the office and I forget this feeling within seconds (Field notes, Bacano, July).

Bacano is located 40 minutes from the city center and is one of the most populated neighborhoods. It is subdivided into 12 sedes; like Chévere, it lacks urban planning. The sede where the organization, VIDA³¹, is based within Bacano has one of the highest poverty rates on the coast. A problem that compounds poverty is the extent to which the area is stigmatized due to the history of Colombia’s violence; a stigmatization that traps residents in a state of social exclusion, disempowerment, and therefore encourages social violence (Reference withheld).

³¹ The research locations, Chévere and Bacano, as well as the SDP organization, VIDA, and participant names are pseudonyms.

Bacano is regularly highlighted in the local media for citizens performing anti-social behavior such as robbery and murder. Many residents arrived in Bacano after having fled outlying areas within the Northeast of Colombia and Venezuela. More than 53 percent of residents subsist on less than two dollars a day (Reference withheld) and 52 percent of the population report feeling insecure (Reference withheld). In 2013, within the region, the neighborhood had the highest rate of homicides with acts of killing and gang violence recorded as the cause (Reference withheld). Moreover, it competes for the lowest level of formal education per person in the region, with an individual average totaling 6.3 years (Reference withheld). Endemic poverty, unregulated construction, and urban sprawl cause insecure homes where residents are exposed to risks such as “diseases of respiratory tract, floods when it rains, no drinking water, no sanitary services” (Staff member, Bacano, Pedro). In 2013, Bacano had the highest number of residents infected with tuberculosis and living with HIV/Aids in the region (Reference withheld).

Bacano's residents are more homogenous than citizens of Chévere, with many citizens identifying as Afro-Colombian³², and all of them identifying as *Costeños*, or coastal people. The heat and humidity, which encourages people to stay outside, engenders an open and loud atmosphere. It is common to hear music, such as Champeta, blare from houses and to see locals enjoying themselves, sitting outside chatting to neighbors or playing board games. There are no imposed curfews and residents participate in the *pickup* culture, where friends dance and drink through the night and

³² Colombians of African descent make up a large percentage of Colombia's citizens (estimated between 10-25 percent) and speak four distinct languages. The coastal regions have higher concentrations of Afro-Colombian communities. For example, in the Bacano area more than 60 percent of its residents identify as Afro-Colombian (Reference withheld). Many Afro-Colombians work(ed) as farmers (campesinos) and were heavily affected by the conflict as their farmland became disrupted by violence, thus forcing displacement and migration into urban locals. Many Afro-Colombian communities have established peace communities and are implementing black processes to gain autonomy.

even the weekend while listening to Champeta. However, gangs are still prominent and have controlled boundaries; most are linked to the marijuana and cocaine industries and recruit teenagers, who then become the main victims of crime (Reference withheld).

Due to cyclical poverty, problems comparable to Chévere exist such as drug consumption and drug sales, children dropping out of school, and child abuse. Tourists provide lucrative economic opportunities for the city, but with these prospects come economic demands for underage prostitution. The construction and performance of gender is stricter in this region. This was observed in my everyday interactions where men openly and aggressively flirted with me in public and in the low participation numbers of female participants in the SDP organization. Although sexism occurred in both locations, in Bacano interlocutors talked about machismo more openly as normative behavior; and observations, which will be shared throughout this thesis, revealed overt sexism and double standards.

Football in Colombia and the emergence of SDP

Colombians consider football a patriotic symbol of Colombian culture, an obsession that unifies the population. When a national game (which is always assumed to be the men's team) is played, the nation stops to watch and *rumba*, party. It is speculated that British men working on the railroad introduced football to local communities surrounding Barranquilla in the early 1900s. Less than a decade later, Colombia's first football team, Barranquilla FC, was created. Since the national team's international debut in the 1962 FIFA World Cup, Colombian football has been closely intertwined with violence. Its first rise in popularity coincided with the end of the La Violencia era, during which 200,000

citizens were killed. Colombia's second World Cup entry took place in 1990, a time when drug cartels reigned. The extent of this relationship is unclear, but a close link between the rise of men's regional teams, the men's national team and powerful drug cartels is evident (Ladrón de Guevara, 2018).

Colombia's men's team entered the 1994 World Cup as a top seed and even though the team was inexperienced, football critics anticipated Colombia would advance past the first bracket with ease and potentially win the tournament. At this time, drug traffickers invested heavily in football betting and laundered their money through clubs. Colombia lost their first game and needed to secure a victory in their second game against the United States to proceed. As the game neared, tensions heightened as players and the coach began receiving death threats. Colombian professional defender, Andrés Escobar accidentally scored an own-goal in the 35th minute, resulting in Colombia's elimination. The team proceeded to beat Switzerland but could not progress further. Embarrassed, they returned home to be received by hostile fans. Many players avoided the public and Escobar himself addressed the situation by writing a letter to a national newspaper asking fans to forgive the team.

Mere days after the media published his letter and within 48 hours of his return to Medellin, his hometown, renowned as the most dangerous city in the world at that time, he was shot twelve times. Bystanders reported that after every shot they heard "goooooal," mimicking the jargon of popular football commentators, being yelled. Escobar's death shocked the international community, but Colombians having already witnessed the murders of football officials and referees in the 1980s, were aware of the close connection between the football industry and the drug cartels (Ladrón de Guevara, 2018).

The multitude of players from low socio-economic backgrounds, who regularly thanked drug lords in public speeches, reconfirmed this association.

Escobar's death was not an isolated incident, but its timing and connection to the World Cup resulted in international attention. In response, German Ph.D. student Jürgen Griesbeck who lived in Medellín and happened to be a family friend of Escobar found motivation to rebrand football as a tool for peace (Cardenas, 2013). Building from a Colombian physical education methodology labeled Baloncoli, Griesbeck and Alejandro Arenas, the coordinator of peace and co-existence programs for Medellín, developed the Football for Peace methodology (Cardenas, 2013). Griesbeck's beginnings in Colombia led to the creation of the current SDP organization, Street Football World. Grassroots and multi-sectorial Football for Peace programs were implemented in Colombia with the goal of using sport as a vehicle for positive social change, especially to combat violence. A unique component of this movement was girls' inclusion in sport participation (Cardenas, 2013).³³

The Football for Peace methodology contradicts gendered social norms since each team is required to include at least two girls. To encourage boys to pass the football to girls, a girl must score the first goal of each half (Cardenas, 2015). Although this methodology is controversial today, the generic mandate for social inclusion of girls and young women in sport was radical, because football in Colombia is socially reserved for boys and men (Velez, 2009). A confusing paradox arises and challenges the gender binary as young women's participation in sport places them in a male classification as they are performing femininity in a way that challenges the association of women with

³³ FIFA had already mandated that Colombia include women in football (in 1991), however, a gap existed between regulation and implementation at the elite level. Gender equity was not enforced, and the movement was slow to gain traction both in terms of infrastructural support and in securing players.

fragility and are actively challenging sport as an exclusively male domain (Oxford & McLachlan, 2017). The inclusion of girls in sport then became more than a method of assembly or a leisure activity; it became manifested as a tool to potentially break down gender stereotypes and sensitize communities to the capabilities of girls and women.

A trend for using sport as a development tool (SFD) was occurring outside Colombia as well and soon became labeled the Sport for Development and Peace movement (SDP). Independently, grassroots NGOs began using sport as a mechanism to attract participants. Similarities between these organizations include small-scale programming, a focus on community participation, and an added educational component confronting a localized social issue. Examples of educational components are health awareness, environmental action, and gender equality.

The diversity and broadness of the field led to assorted definitions of SFD and SDP and various implementation strategies (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Spaaij, Schlenker, Jeanes, & Oxford, 2017). This resulted in conflicting understandings and critiques of the field. Researchers first questioned the historical implications underpinning the SDP model (Darnell, 2007; Donnelly, Atkinson, Boyle, & Szto, 2011; Giulianotti, 2011). With further establishment, researchers then looked at whether sport could be a mechanism to influence social processes, such as gender equity, economic and social empowerment, and peace building (Brady & Banu Khan, 2002; Brady, Ibrahim, Salem, & Salem, 2007; Hayhurst, Macneill, Kidd, & Knoppers, 2014; Jeanes, 2005, 2013; Levermore & Beacom, 2009; Meier, 2005; Saavedra, 2005, 2009; Spaaij 2011, 2013).

SDP's community focus and accessible programming (including: low operating expenses, adaptability to location, and social inclusivity) garnered support from the United Nations (UN, 2013). The UN identified that SDP "holds considerable promise as a social justice and development strategy" and subsequently labeled 2005 the International Year for Sport and Physical Education (Hayhurst, 2011, p. 21). The UN's strong endorsement for SDP aided in legitimizing the movement (Kidd, 2008) and encouraged a proliferation of SDP programs, particularly within the Global South. The majority of SDP programs stemmed from grassroots initiatives and were launched after the year 2000 with 52 percent operating in Sub-Saharan Africa (Levermore and Beacom, 2009). This revealed the rising consensus that "orthodox 'development' initiatives had failed to deliver their objectives" (Levermore and Beacom, 2009, p. 1).

Rather than focus strictly on economics like most development initiatives, SFD activities concentrate on a social problem within a localized social environment. As the UN shifted to prioritize cultural and social issues along with economic growth, opportunities for new collaboration between Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) linking football clubs to government aid to NGOs commenced. Support from a variety of stakeholders (excluding the World Bank and IMF) confirmed sport as a targeted means to advance poverty eradication. Kofi Anan and other leaders heralded sport as a powerful tool to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) created in 2000 by the UN Millennium Summit, to bring global attention to poverty eradication. Sport appeared to be a pathway strongly supported by the United Nations to attain the current 17 Sustainable Development Goals established in 2015 until April 2017, when the United Nations office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) quietly closed its office

doors and transferred power to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). This resulted in many questions about the future trajectory of SDP and the role of the IOC transitioning from partner to UN insider.

The influence of streamlined goals and substantial funding from top-down institutions prompted questions about the power dynamics between the grassroots creators and top-down donors (Oxford and Spaaij, 2017). In response, academics across disciplines began to red-flag ideological concerns. This number of academics, however, is rather limited, with few stemming from the extremely pertinent ‘developmentalist’ community (Levermore and Beacom, 2009). Levermore and Beacom (2009) suggest this is due to the broad claims of SDP potential and the historical identification of sport as an exclusive male-dominated domain that falls within the pop-culture realm.

Brady and Banu Khan’s (2002) report titled *Letting Girls Play*, laid the foundation for exploring the relationship between SDP and gender, which is now labeled Sport, Gender and Development (SGD). Assumptions of gender transformation emerged after several changes were identified to have taken place, once girls were included in sport: gendered public spaces began to be redefined to include female athletes (Brady, 2005); female role models outside of the home were created (Meier and Saavedra, 2009); and, female social networks were expanded (Brady, Ibrahim, Salem, & Salem, 2007). These observations led Saavedra (2009) to argue that female participation in gender-sensitive SDP organizations “has the power to upend what is seen/presented as ‘normal’ and [has] become a major force to social change beyond sport by challenging gender norms” (p. 127); and Brady (2005), to argue the benefits girls receive from participating in sport far outweigh the risks.

Top-down donors and SDP organizations have been quick to note, or assume, progressive gender-related outcomes. For example, Read and Bingham (2009), respectively representing Right to Play and UK Sport, point to anecdotal evidence of SDP contributing to the Millennium Development Goal of “promoting gender equality and empowering women” (p. xvi).³⁴ But researchers have been more cautionary and propose research that explores how circumstances and specific sports result in positive gender related outcomes (Kidd and Donnelly, 2000). Kidd (2008) requests data concerning female empowerment, the culture of predatory male sexuality, and how to teach boys and men to embrace sexual responsibility. With concern, Chawansky (2011) posits the SDP movement may draw heavily from Third Wave feminism and post-feminist critiques, resulting in a generic and limited conceptualization of gender and thus gender equality. Darnell (2012) questions if this application of Third Wave feminism is not a post-colonial notion of one group saving the “other.”

Levermore (2009) concurs with Darnell’s (2012) argument writing that the SDP movement is “cultural imperialism or even false consciousness,” but he proceeds to soften his critique stating that gender equality does “redress” other perceived injustices (p.48). From a macro perspective, McDonald (2015, 2017) critically questions the influence of Western ideals on sport’s “allegedly” positive role in gender relations. Looking at the United States of America’s national policy and the State Department’s

³⁴ Examples include: “The inclusion of girls in sport and play activities alongside boys is a powerful means to alter gender stereotypes at the community level”; “Sport activities give women and girls access to public spaces that allow them to gather together, develop social networks and meet with each other in a safe environment”; and, “Training female teachers as ‘coaches’ effectively develops and mobilizes female community leaders and role models, and increases community commitment to include girls in sport” (Read and Bingham, 2009, p. xvi).

“Empowering Women and Girls through Sports” initiative, she contextualizes unique sporting rhetoric and narratives that accompany this assumption and questions the relationship of this paradigm to a rise in neoliberal feminism and securing international interests.

The current SDP paradigm includes the “girling of SDP,” whereby there is an increased presence of female participants, specific SGD agendas targeting how girls’ lives can be improved and more research addressing the complexities of gender relations within sport and SDP as a global industry (Chawanksy and Hayhurst, 2015). Providing a critical review of SDP literature, Chawansky (2011) comments that the inclusion of female participants has evolved into two categories; organizations either “allow” girls to play in a co-ed environment, or “empower” girls in a single-sex program. She argues SDP takes a Western ontological perspective whereby girls either need to be altered or improved (e.g., be given access or be empowered), and consequently, she argues, the SDP movement is missing an opportunity to make concrete social change. Chawanksy (2011) encourages researchers and practitioners to look beyond the Western hegemonic framing of gender to consider the structural restrictions and realities of engendering change through sport, when girls’ involvement is positioned within boys’ social privilege and a masculine-oriented SDP structure. She calls for a reimagining of gender relations within mixed-SDP programming. Through empirical research, Hayhurst, Macneill, Kidd, and Knoppers (2014) question how gender relations are influenced by girls’ participation in a self-defense SGD organization in Uganda. They suggest female participants challenge gender norms, but at the cost of experiencing emotional abuse. As such, the

cost attached to participants' "increased self-esteem, confidence and self-defense skills" that assisted them in challenging gender-based stereotypes is questioned (p. 165).

Chawansky (2011) notes "the academic literature on mixed-gender SDP contexts is dismally silent" (p. 127). An argument agreed upon by Hayhurst, Macneill, Kidd, and Knoppers (2014). Referencing Brady (2005), Chawansky (2011) writes, "literature is limited when it comes to documented attempts to transform gendered relationships between boys and girls within the SDP movement" (p.129). And Meier (2005) concurs, stating, "there is still a lack of substantiated evidence to support this purported potential of sport and its specific impact on gender relationships" (p. 4). Hayhurst, Macneill, Kidd, and Knoppers (2014) explain, "It is surprising that there has been minimal research, with some recent exceptions (e.g., Bateman and Binns, 2014) that directly investigates and traces (1) how challenging gender norms and shifting gender relations actually transpire through SGD programmes..." (p. 158). There remains much to explore in the context of gender within SDP organizations and SFD programming. This research suggests adding to the current knowledge base by analyzing the mechanisms and social processes that are shaping, constraining, and potentially engendering a transformation in gender relations, due to young women's participation in a mixed-gender SDP organization located in Colombia.

The community of practice: VIDA

Colombian professionals founded the organization, VIDA, at the turn of the millennium, after being inspired by a football for development program initiated by Pele in Brazil's favelas. The organization is a registered non-profit in multiple nations. Its vision is to

positively change Colombia by investing in children, which correlates with its mission to improve the lives of children and their communities through sport, recreation, education, and health. In contrast to the Brazilian program that scouted talented athletes, the founders supported marginalized youth by providing them a safe space to play, and assisting them to enroll and stay in school.

VIDA's central office is in a wealthy neighborhood in the center of a major city. Their field offices are located throughout the country in neighborhoods with low socio-economic indicators such as a high number of residents who identify as internally displaced, insecure housing, poor infrastructure, and everyday violence (e.g. domestic and gang-related). The organization states that it reaches thousands of children who play in more than two-dozen communities. Children begin around age five and continue into early adulthood. Leaders range in age from 13 to 22. In conjunction with social learning's (e.g., methods of communication and non-violence) and scholastic support (e.g., writing and math), each location incorporates sport and play at the center of their methodology. The structure is highly reliant on youth leaders who undergo leadership and coaching trainings; these individuals lead daily practices and are viewed by the young participants as role models. Leaders are frequently rewarded with opportunities to experience life outside of their neighborhoods, through opportunities such as academic scholarships and national or international conferences. Colombia's diverse geography and multicultural population creates unique challenges determined by the respective geography and local history. The organization does not have a standard methodology for incorporating education into sport, but draws from multiple approaches endorsed by various leading international SDP-focused foundations, mostly located in the Global North. Often

activities include a physical game underpinned by a theme such as ‘communication’. After the game, youth leaders and sometimes social workers will lead a discussion about the theme. However, on many occasions when there is an inadequate number of staff, children spend their time playing football without structure. All field offices use the most popular sport in Colombia, football, but many include other activities such as dancing, rollerblading, and chess.

A community-based analysis determines local social challenges as understood by the community. The psychologists and social workers in their respective field offices collate responses and select the values to be taught through field activities, by the coaches and youth leaders. Gloria Laura, an employee working in Chévere discussed this process saying:

The socially accepted values, because as you know, what for me is a value may be for you, isn't a value. So it becomes an anti-value. So we have some institutional values such as a sense of belonging, honesty, respect, and tolerance. In addition to these, we add other sub-values that are related to those. These are the ones that we work with throughout the course of the year, because this is a subjective concept. What is honesty for me, maybe isn't honesty for you. So then we have established values, with some categories of VIDA, we identify the needs of those values in the community, beside the children, through a small survey. For example, ‘what are the values that should be the most practiced in the community?’ And at the same time we include their parents. (Staff member, Chévere, Gloria Laura)

For example, in areas with high numbers of displaced families from diverse regions, such as Chévere, social lessons focus on integration, tolerance, and friendship. The implementation of the social curriculum depends on the staff (the Bacano field office has extensive numbers of social workers conducting their university placement) and access to resources. These could be planned events or sporadic learning moments on the field. In observations, the field staff implemented elements of critical pedagogy, creating a community of practice that is nurturing and encourages empathy and compassion (Oxford & Spaaij, 2017).

The organization extends itself beyond community-sport programming. Its leaders, coaches, social workers, and psychologists reach out to parents, siblings, and community members through community events, such as parent meetings where coaches demonstrate daily activities and social workers talk about values and goals. Through these demonstrations, they encourage discussion on sensitive topics such as domestic violence and positive communication. They also use the safe space³⁵ and trust they have established and garnered in the community to meet resident's needs. Examples include bringing doctors and health specialists to the office; providing children who are victims of landmines and conflict with funding for prosthesis and support for physical and psychological rehabilitation; and, organizing community clothing sales, where clothing is sold at affordable prices. In addition to structured events, they offer community members access to further support mechanisms such as the Internet, providing advocacy when

³⁵ In this research, space is understood as “an imaginary construction reliant on ritualized forms of control,” with control coming in multiple forms such as from parents, guerrillas, the Church, and the government (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1349). Safe space includes psychological considerations, social interactions, and human relationships that impact the feeling of being safe, as well as physical security.

dealing with government systems (e.g., school and hospital) and mediating local disputes. For this reason, I identify VIDA as a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991):

A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement of an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464)

A community of practice does not exclude relations between institutions or other communities, but it may include members who participate in varying degrees, such as a participant who attends VIDA a few days a week, a parent who interacts once a month or a community member who only attends health-focused events.

Beyond having regular access to a community of supportive people and a safe space, children can benefit from scholastic support and academic scholarships. Once the child has been registered with the organization for more than one year, they are eligible for a school sponsorship program whereby they are given a book bag, notebooks, and necessary materials. In exchange, the students write letters to the donor about their life and achievements. Leaders volunteer their time to tutor younger participants in math, writing, and homework assignments. In addition, there are university scholarships and small bursaries for extracurricular activities (e.g., traveling interstate to play in a football tournament). The ratio of sponsor to child is 1:1.2; most were recruited at fundraising events in the United States or registered through the organization's website.

Organization structure and leadership

In response to the reality of the organization's reliance on corporate donations, they began to strategically plan for a response in case of a significant shortage of funds. To prepare for this, they trained leaders in a program called CAMBIO. Leaders were questioned about how they would respond if the organization ceased to exist, and then trained in the organization's methodology and given management tasks such as leading field practices. The program goal is to empower youth leaders with the skills to continue operations in some capacity, if the organization can no longer operate. In strategic design, leaders were given more voice and responsibilities in program operations.

Training leaders is the second goal after enrolling children in school and supporting their continued education. To date, there are more than 100 trained leaders nationwide. Training occurs throughout the year. A typical training lasts one week. Participants receive permission from their schools to voluntarily attend from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily and are provided with meals. Leaders participate in activities that hone in on both hard and soft teaching skills. For example, in one activity leaders wrote down two leadership goals and presented the goals to the group. They then posted them on the wall with their colleagues' goals and everyone worked together to find common themes and active solutions. Goals ranged from personal, with one leader stating he had trouble speaking in front of people, to logistical, with another leader commenting he needed more balls to run drills. An observation noted when an employee addressed the leaders was:

[She] asked ‘how can we be more supportive with school? What processes can be more helpful? Let us know what you need and like. We want to hear your ideas.’

She then explained the concept of a process. They talked about Tomas being new and shy and Juan Jose mentioned how two years ago he couldn’t speak, but now he can’t stop! (field notes, Chévere)

The trainings are not only in the classroom, but also on the field. In groups, leaders and coaches present an exercise to the other participants in the classroom, and then they practice the exercise on the field. Afterwards, everyone returns to the classroom where the leaders discuss the theory and the reasoning behind the exercise they created, as well as what worked and what did not. Here, leaders are given feedback, and they also provide constructive comments to the coaches and social workers, revealing a horizontal power structure within the field offices. These activities encouraged leaders to speak candidly about everyday challenges in the neighborhood, which led to open discussion on how to mitigate these challenges and make the organization more effective.

Operating funds, corporate relations and networking

Corporate sponsors contribute the bulk of the VIDA’s funds, rendering VIDA completely dependent upon the donor. As conditions are attached to these donations, the “soft power” dynamic and sustainability of these relationships becomes critically questioned (Oxford and Spaaij, 2017). There is pressure to maintain positive relations with a large number of donors who all have various agendas and stipulations. Donors require extensive reporting and proof of on the ground successes, such as videos, photos, and

quantitative data. Often donations are created for a specific program and timeline. It is clear that due to an increase in donors and funds there has been regular expansion in the number of offices throughout Colombia, resulting in more areas being reached. However, sustainability is an issue. For example, a few years ago due to financial constraints, one field office (neither Chévere nor Bacano) was closed; the following year, a new field office was established in a new location with support from a local government office, an international bank, and an international business. It is important to note that the organization does not receive any financial support from the Colombian government because it is not politically or religiously affiliated.

Each field office receives a varied allotment of funding depending on the local budget and the donor agreement. Many donor requirements do not affect the organization as a whole, but target specific field offices. For example, at Chévere and Bacano, a number of staff members were on short-term casual contracts to support specific projects. Staff members regularly displayed stress about the unsustainable positioning of projects that relied on short-term funding. Without corporate sponsorship, the organization, as it is structured today could not exist. Community needs versus donor expectations become complicated and top-down, and local goals are not at the forefront (Oxford and Spaaij, 2017).

Newfound visibility and international recognition from marketing campaigns and corporate sponsorship have positively impacted the organization in many ways. For example, donors have assisted the organization with building extensive networks that enabled VIDA to receive recognition through international awards. Participants, leaders, and employees received and continue to have travel opportunities. Many leaders proudly

spoke of their cross-cultural experiences traveling to the United States, South Africa, England, Latin America, and throughout Colombia, to demonstrate the organization's methodology and to learn from others. These events include sports-based festivals, science-focused competitions, SDP/NGO conferences, and professional football games (e.g. World Cup and the Premiere League). In addition, the organization works with a nonprofit that assists youth in finding employment or returning to school. More than ten percent of young participants currently receive school support. Each year between five and ten leaders per location receive academic support to attend university or a career-focused tertiary program (e.g. cooking). One leader is currently studying at a community college in the United States; another leader received an academic scholarship to study business compatibility in the capital. In a five-year period, more than 100 participants learned skills like driving a motorcycle, working at a call center, and filing and using a computer in an office.

VIDA has strong connections with other SDP-focused organizations that donate resources and trainings (Names withheld). These organizations, predominantly based in the Global North, make annual visits to various field offices to assist with pedagogy and methodology. They also promote networking and international visibility. The organization is a member of a networking foundation that links SDP organizations in 60 countries. VIDA has received multiple international awards (Titles withheld). National and international recognition led to an opportunity for the organization's director to become a participant in national discussions initiated by President Santos, to create a ten-year plan to use football as a means of social improvement throughout Colombia.

Along with many other sport and sport and development organizations or bodies, VIDA's Executive Director participated in the organization of the Colombian government's plan to improve Colombia's sporting culture, called "Plan decenal de Seguridad, Comodidad y Convivencia en el fútbol 2014 - 2024." The plan has two goals: the short-term goal is to control violence through unification (e.g., to "clean up" professional football through the creation of a National Executive Body that will implement this policy); the long-term strategy is to address the causes of violence and find ways to use sport as a tool for social transformation. Through this plan, VIDA gained recognition inside Colombia and became a player in the government's SDP agenda. Through the examples above, the establishment of SDP in Colombia and the recent investment of the Colombian government in SDP, it is relevant to consider how macro-social relations can potentially shape and constrain the lived experience of individuals in neighborhoods like Chévere and Bacano. While it is critical to understand history and current social context, it is also important to situate data within academic debates. To do this, I will next explore gender theory

Chapter 4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender and Gender Relations

In the 21st century, the gender binary permeates all aspects of social life – from how youth sports teams are organized to those who monopolize top leadership positions in international business.³⁶ Ordinary forms and applications uniformly question individuals' sex with a tick box for male or female. The multitude of categories and terms that can describe gender are a significant research subject in social sciences and a controversial subject in pop-culture. The omnipresent and fluid term, gender, frequently evokes discomfort and confusion (even among gender scholars) as it stimulates discussion on a range of complex topics heavily connected to identity, inequality, and power.

In this thesis, the concept of gender will be examined with focus on three themes pertinent to this research. The first is the micro-subjective gendered experience. For this research, this term is defined as the pre-cognitive and cognitive processes that occur and the embodied interactions that are performed in congruence with the individual's gendered lived experience (i.e., habitus). The second theme, meso-social relations, includes the context for which embodiment is influenced; this comprises the cultural makeup and historical founding of our social worlds that affect social order and gender relations (i.e., family, school). On the spectrum of meso and macro social relations, topics such as sport, community and religion are fluid and contextually dependent. Macro social relations includes gendered social structures in relation to institutions in power (i.e.,

³⁶ In 2017, Fortune Magazine's list of chief executives from the 500 largest transnational corporations includes 26 women and zero women of color.

national government, Catholic Church) in Colombia. It also considers the role of global politics, the feminist discourse within it, and the possibility of social change.

Gender as a term gained traction in the mid-20th century in the United States and Europe. The term provided agency to women who until this period in the modern-colonial gender system had been scientifically labeled as “incomplete men” and socially portrayed as “irrational beings” (Hall, 2002; Holmes, 2007; Young, 2005). White women’s social classification registered below men but above animals, and non-white women remained largely omitted from the conversation.³⁷ The current gender discourse has significantly moved away from these original thoughts. In present time, theoretical underpinnings subscribe to the terms male and female as reference to the human biology of sex and genetics. The concepts of man and woman are considered social constructions, determined by various social, economic, and historical factors (Glenn, 1999; Lorber, 1994, 2011; Moi, 1999; Messner, 1990).

Many feminist researchers are now using the terms “sex/gender” or “gender/sex” to “emphasize that when you compare the sexes you are always looking at the product of an inextricable mix of biological sex and gender constructions” (Fine, 2017, p. 26). This differentiation does not create smooth reading however, and often the terms are conflated. The focus of this text is gender ascriptions, not biological sex. I recognize the complex connection between the two. I use the term girl to reference participants between the ages of five and 14 who publicly presented as girls; I use the word young woman to represent individuals who publicly identified as women and are between the ages of 15 and 22. I use the phrases “female participant” and “female footballer” not to reference these

³⁷ For an example of how an African American woman protested the dehumanization of non-white women, see Sojourner Truth’s speech from 1851 “Ain’t I a woman”?

individuals' biological sex, but to refrain from writing the bulky phrase "girl and young women participants" throughout the text.

Gender relations and social order

As gender became a cornerstone in sociological study, the complexity of gender relations and social processes within the modern-colonial gender system gained more attention. Connell (2005b), Butler (2004), and Deutsch (2007) agree that gender is a discursive practice, selectively implemented by the individual who can play out manly or womanly-ness. Gender also concerns the existence of prescribed practices that affect society at large, dividing it among gender binary lines, such as wage labor, childcare, and sexuality.

The modern-colonial gender discourse includes three clear arguments pertinent to this research: First, gender is a social construction (Lorber, 2006, Lorber and Farrell, 1991; Messner, 1990). Second, it is a continuously evolving process shaped and constrained by the individual experience and social institutions (Deutsch, 2007; Lorber, 1994, 2000; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Third, patriarchal social systems, which are the most commonly exercised in modern society, trace power and lineage (e.g. surname, land rights, inheritance) through men. Social organization through male lineage is a central argument for gender inequality in feminist theory and debate. Masculine hegemony coupled with the historical colonial legacy of patriarchy, "ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men and those not characterized as masculine actors" (Connell, 2005b, p. 832).

In addressing this, Connell (1985) noted a distinction among the groupings, stating "[t]he social categories of gender are quite unlike other categories of social

analysis, such as class, in being firmly and visibly connected to biological difference and function in a biological process” (p. 266). Through this argument, Connell applied “gender relations” to address common social issues in relation to gender, such as:

[T]he social subordination of women, and the cultural practices that sustain it; the politics of sexual object-choice, and particularly the oppression of homosexual people; the sexual division of labour; the formation of character and motive, so far as they are organized as femininity and masculinity; the role of the body in social relations, especially the politics of childbirth; and the nature and strategies of sexual liberation movements. (Connell, 1985, p. 261)

Gender relations are a fluid and evolving phenomenon, experienced daily by the individual, often without thought or consideration. Yet, these relations between humans are deeply embedded in historical and cultural processes, controlled and re-established by hegemonic powers. Every day humans use gendered words and live out gendered processes that may appear and feel normal in current time.

More than thirty years later, gender remains a core matter in addressing social inequality as described below by Lorber (2006) who explains the reach of gender within feminism and social stratification as follows:

The paradigm shift in feminist social science starts with the concept of gender as an organizing principle of the overall social order in modern societies and all social institutions, including the economy, politics, religion, the military, education, and medicine, not just the family. In this conceptualization, gender is not just a part of personality structures and identity, but is a formal, bureaucratic

status, as well as a status in multidimensional stratification systems, political economies, and hierarchies of power. (p. 448)

As evidenced by Lorber's quotation above, conceptualizations of gender and the gender discourse is closely situated near Western (white) feminist ideology. A repercussion of alienating and omitting non-white voices; or, asymmetrical power relations is post-feminism (Paarlberg-Kvam, 2016).

In *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message That Feminism's Work is Done*, Douglas (2010) argues sexism morphed from obvious discrimination (1950s) into indirect and subtle discrimination masked through tropes like "girl power." She deftly questions sexism in the new millennium through the lens of modern media, paying homage to powerful female figures in television and pop-culture that are rarely replicated to the same degree in real life (i.e., female presidents and surgeons).

When addressing patriarchy and inequality due to social hierarchy, many women identifying with socially marginalized groups related to class, race/ethnicity, and/or sexuality find the assumption of gender as their primary association for socio-political debate off-putting. Since the 1970s, black feminist scholars such as Combahee River Collective, Angela Davis (2011), Bell Hooks (2015) and Patricia Hill Collins (2013) have been arguing that for non-white women, race/ethnicity and gender are inseparable. Power relations are critical to understanding non-white women's social positioning. They faulted white/mainstream feminism for not addressing the challenges faced by non-white women and for erasing non-white women from the conversation.

Feminist from the Global South identified as Third World, Global or Postcolonial feminist argue feminism has largely focused on women in the Western world, and that

their experiences, particularly in relation to colonialism, as non-white, non-Western women go unheard. For example, Nigerian scholar Oyèwùmí (1997, 2002, 2011) argues that woman/man gendered categories were a colonial imposition that did not exist in Yorùbá culture prior to colonialism. She contends a gendered social hierarchy did not exist either and criticizes feminist who assume so and therefore apply their experiences onto Yorùbá society (Coetzee, 2018, 2017). Oyèwùmí argues that the “dominant (Western) categories through which we understand the world are not universal, but culturally specific and therefore contingent” (Coetzee, 2017, p. 2). Other feminist African scholars are not in agreement. Nigerian scholar Mama (2001) confronts Oyèwùmí arguing gender has been a central organizing principle in African societies.

Nevertheless, Oyèwùmí’s argument is becoming more common place in post-colonial feminist scholarship outside of the African context. It is argued that Native American societies embraced five genders and pre-colonial Asian societies did not divide along binary lines (Coetzee, 2017). Argentinian and leading decolonial philosopher, Lugones pushes the relationship between colonialism and gender to argue that feminism and gender studies, as movements and subjects in and of themselves, are a repercussion of colonial rule, noting the “fictionality” of gender as a principle of social organizing pre-contact in Latin America (Lugones, 2007). Lugones’ arguments have been criticized in terms of the legitimacy of historical methodology and data regarding gender relations pre-contact, however. Giving praise to her ideas, but criticizing her methodology, Giraldo (2016a,b) urges a discourse revision where the focus becomes the historical present and female subjectivity rather than the past. This thesis aims to begin to fulfill Giraldo’s request.

The numerous and diverse feminist positions illuminate the multiplicity of ways that gender and oppression are understood. Feminist groups demonstrate that women are not delimited by identity (micro-subjectivity) alone but are constrained by formal historically bound systems and structures. This is particularly pertinent to feminist movements in Colombia.

Gender in Colombia

Colombia's gender order is nestled into a postfeminist regime, where "enlightened sexism" became "entwined with a male-chauvinist gender logic" (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 67). Enlightened sexism is embedded within the theory of postfeminism, where feminism is considered no longer necessary (Douglas, 2010). Giraldo (2016b) explains:

Under postfeminism (broadly) and in the cultural context of Colombia (specifically), 'Woman' is precisely defined and understood as being 'the complementary and spectacular other of man'. Further, the body that embraces spectacular hyperfemininity is the one which interpellates the Colombian woman as such so that female body capital becomes crucial in the affective economy of being both woman and Colombian. (p. 72)

The relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism is an important historical configuration within Colombia's gender debate because the discursive processes that are normalizing enlightened sexism are also preserving the patriarchal culture that accommodates men.

Colombian scholars Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) and Florence Thomas (1995) red-flag the processes underpinning the Colombian gender order and argue that exploring the social positioning of women in Colombian society is critical in order to comprehensively understand and transform society:

To question how the feminine has been codified in the symbolic order, to understand how it has been signified and inscribed in the culture becomes of foremost importance if we want to be able to understand and transform such historical productions. (2001, p. 472)

Their research demonstrates that embodiment, or social and cultural ways of being is historical, which means through normative rituals people are shaped by macro forces like religion and violence. For example, colonialism and the Catholic Church established the dominant forms of gender as practiced in the 21st century; and the conservative elite and Catholic Church continue to be co-dependent in Colombia. In tandem, they almost seamlessly promote political/religious interests, linking politics to religious doctrine, working against liberal politicians, preaching that women should be devoted to domestic life, and ardently campaigning to eliminate abortion. Through these power structures, male-centric, hetero-sexual domination became the pillar of social organizing, and the hegemonic performance of masculinity and femininity became intertwined with individual and family reputation (Sanabria, 2007). Masculinity (relating to men) is held in

esteem and as superior to its assumed opposite, femininity (relating to women) and a central tenant to the Colombian socialization process is upholding the gender binary.³⁸

The hegemonic Colombian gender order operates through a gender-based division which is evident in care versus leisure time, occupation of public space, roles in the home, roles in the workforce and politics (Viveros Vigoya, 2016b). These customary rules operate in micro, meso and macro social ways. For example, women are to raise children and clean the home as their primary occupation of time. The kitchen, in particular, is their domain and cooking for the family, their responsibility. It is common for men and children to return mid-day for lunch. Men are expected to work for money and navigate public space, this includes political conversations (Paternostro, 1999). Men can enter into private space, but it still belongs to women; however, women's inclusion into public space is dangerous as it frequently evokes violence by men onto women's bodies (see, Viveros Vigoa, 2016b). Although gender performativity in Colombia includes hegemonic (and violent) masculinity and spectacular femininity, like elsewhere, gender roles and norms are not static or monolithic and have changed over time. Even with severe social pressure to adhere to the gender binary, the reality – much to Catholic conservatives' dismay – is a one-size-fits-all gender box does not exist.³⁹

Although men dominate the limelight in Colombia, women's tireless movements have been critical towards improving power relations and progressing the nation towards peace. Feminism in Colombia is as diverse as its multi-cultural population and geography,

³⁸ For an example of the socialization process, consider that at birth a baby's ears are pierced to denote girl.

³⁹ I regret that the consequence of focusing my research on gender relations and predominantly young women in sport (which is another arena that organizes along binary lines) is that the minority groups (e.g., transgender, queer) that fall along this spectrum are unheard in the conversation because of boundaries, limitation, and focus. On the same note, in this thesis, I will reference masculinities in Colombia, but only superficially. A project focusing on theories and embodied practices of masculinities would greatly complement this research.

but colonialism's legacy and power relations are key denominators for protest. In particular the feminist groups Ruta Pacífica, the Movimiento Social de Mujeres contra la Guerra y Por la Paz (MSM) and the Red de Mujeres del Caribe Colombiano (RMCC) have connected to communities, regions and nationally (Paarlberg-Kvam, 2016).

Insurgent feminism, presented during the peace talks by the FARC in Havana in 2014 – 2016 is currently gaining traction. The FARC's Marxist doctrine included abolishing hierarchies and it declared itself an anti-patriarchal organization. Although the highest-ranking leaders were men, FARC women have reported feminism is an embedded FARC practice whereby all members shared duties such as cooking and fighting on the front lines (Boutron, 2017). Insurgent feminists are anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchy. They connect women's emancipation to the class struggle.⁴⁰

Colombians face distinctive gender-related challenges such as femicide⁴¹, conflict-related sexual violence, and the entanglement of social oppressions like class and race. Although women's organizations have been active and made gains in Colombia since the 1950s (UNDP, 2012), a feminist movement comparative to the West (United States and Europe) has been slower to materialize (Giraldo, 2016b). However, the feminist groups that are in operation tend to marry political activism with social action and activists' geographic and multi-cultural diversity results in various issues of focus and diverse responses to oppressions (Giraldo, 2016a). As demonstrated above, there are competing political projects taking place that shape gender in Colombia and diverse

⁴⁰ For more, follow Victoria Sandino or read the website [mujer fariana](#) (Boutron, 2017).

⁴¹ Femicide is understood as the killing of a woman by a man because of her gender. Murders are frequently linked to current and former intimate partners. In 2016, Colombian newspaper El espectador reported femicide rates of 4 women per day between 2009 and 2014 and 90 percent perpetrator impunity. The lack of government response to gender-based violence has motivated feminist groups to protest in public spaces and on Twitter.

methods of feminism in action. Giraldo (2016b) argues decolonial feminism in Latin America incorporates two key elements in action: an orientation “towards questions of praxis, social commitment, and political activism in the face of state aggression” and a “community focus as its focus of attention” (p. 57).

Theories surrounding the Colombian gender order and gender performativity will be delved into throughout this thesis. As previously noted, gender relations are not siloed from other social oppressions like race/ethnicity, class and sexuality. To clarify and give structure to a multi-ethnic population within a class-divided nation without dividing or categorizing social issues, I will examine the theory of intersectionality (Vuola, 2012) and the theory of differentiated intersectionalities/entanglements (Grosfoguel, 2016). It is to these related theories that I now turn.

A differentiated Intersectionalities/entanglements approach

In the 1970s, the Combahee River Collective, an active lesbian black feminist group from Boston confirmed “the personal is political” by demonstrating the connections between politics, theory, methodology and orientation which laid the grounds for the intersectional paradigm (Viveros Vigoya, 2016a, p. 4). Intersectionality also has roots in indigenous theories from areas such as Brazil (Roberts and Connell, 2016; Viveros Vigoya, 2016a). However, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) of the United States is credited for coining the term intersectionality as a sociological theory. In a shift in feminist research, she explained the variances in the lived experiences between white Americans and black Americans that had been overlooked by the feminist movement, recognizing that African American women were experiencing violence and salary discrimination differently than white

women (Vuola, 2012). Collins (2000), the first writer to explain intersectionality as a feminist paradigm, comprehensively explains the interplay among socially constructed identifiers and the need for intersectionality as a sociological research tool:

Her gender may become more prominent when she is a mother, her race when she searches for housing, her social class when she applies for credit, her sexual orientation when she is walking with her lover, and her citizenship status when she is applying for a job. (p. 274)

Collins' description clarifies the need for intersectional thinking; one social oppression is not more important than the other as they all shape and constrain each other and can change depending on the time, place and circumstance. In macro-social terms, Choo and Marx Feree (2010) argue intersectionality "pushes analysis away from associating specific inequalities with unique institutions, instead looking for processes that are fully interactive, historically co-determining, and complex" (p. 129). Not all academics agree that institutions can be eradicated from the equation of social oppressions.

Latin American feminists have noted intersectionality is not a hegemonic concept outside the West and many argue it cannot be applied in Latin America as it has in North America – that is, with a focus on gender and race. Viveros Vigoya (2016a) identifies class and compulsory heterosexuality may be more prominent oppressions, whereas Curiel (2011) maintains her attention on race and epistemology. Other writers highlight issues such as indigenous spirituality and embodiment (Marcos, 2009). Lugones (2010) argues having intersections fragments social relations into homogenous categories, rather

than fostering crossover. Further research baggage includes academics' faults for using intersectionality to try to make "everything fit," an issue Viveros Vigoya (2016a) argues can be circumvented by paying respect to context.

From a macro political perspective, Grosfoguel (2016) argues intersectionality falls short because those who developed the concept experience oppression differently than people living in places lacking law and regulated order (e.g., Bacano and Chévere). Looking beyond a Global North and Global South dichotomy, he argues the world is divided between two zones established by the "imperial/capitalist/colonial world-system": the "zone of being" and the "zone of non-being" (p. 11). In the zone of being, residents have access to infrastructure and laws that can counteract oppressions, conflict is managed through "regulation and emancipation," and violence is only used in "exceptional moments" (p.13). In this zone, racism is "mitigated by privilege" (p. 11).

Whereas in the zone of non-being, racism is "an institutional/structural hierarchy related to the material of domination" (p. 11). In other words, people living in the zone of non-being, such as citizens of Bacano and Chévere, are racialized as inferior despite their skin color. In the zone of non-being, there is no governed code of law; there is perpetual violence with exceptional moments of "emancipation and regulation" and the entanglements of human oppression are "aggravated by racial oppression" (p. 12). Grosfoguel argues, there is a qualitative difference in the lived experience of people living within these two heterogeneous zones: the zone of being includes the "capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system" that focuses on the "I" – the "Western, heterosexual, masculine, metropolitan elites and the Westernized, heterosexual, masculine elites" who internalize colonialism (p.12); and

the zone of non-being includes the “other” whose humanity is unrecognized (p. 14). Unrecognized non-being/ sub-humans do not have the same “norms of rights or civility” as beings, and acts of violence in these zones are permitted (p.14). Ultimately, these two zones work in tandem to form part of the “project of colonial modernity” (p.15).

Modernity includes the processes, attitudes socio-cultural norms and social stratifications that arose from the Renaissance (17th century) and Enlightenment (18th century) periods. Aspects of modernity include prioritization of individualism, representative democracy, faith in science/technological innovation and rationalization, capitalism and the market economy, industrialization, urbanization and globalization, the interconnection of historically tied nation-states, mass media and consumer culture (Foucault and Sheridan, 1977).

Throughout this research I endeavor to demonstrate that institutionalized racism, the historical residue of colonialism and the push for modernity continue to plague the citizens of Chévere and Bacano and shape the operations of VIDA. To do this, I will draw from Grosfoguel (2016) and use the term entanglement when addressing diverse oppressions (e.g., gender, class, sexuality and race) that influence individual agency and gender relations.

Entanglements of diverse oppressions are at play in Colombia in a myriad of ways. As Curiel (2011) explains, “Displacement mainly affects Afro and indigenous women. Sexual violence against women is a weapon of war. Indigenous and black communities are sites of everyday conflict and where we see the installation of neoliberal megaprojects” (p. 26, personal translation). I found this approach helpful throughout my fieldwork. For example, in my field notes, I regularly highlighted and reflected upon the

entanglements of multiple social oppressions, which allowed me to recognize the hegemonic social structures that shape and limit agency. For instance, my first day in Chévere I met Lourdes, a previous participant who often spent time at the SDP organization. After I explained my research to her she made a statement that reflects the entanglements of diverse oppressions in her life as a female footballer:

No one's asked me this question before, about gender. I hadn't thought of it in *this* way. I *love* playing football, but everyone calls me a lesbian or a boy. I have many friends who will want to talk to you. But hey, do you realize we have *a lot* of violence in our homes? Like, every home. (Field notes, Chévere)

Lourdes' example demonstrates the need to consider the entanglements of diverse social oppressions in sociological research. What is obvious in her brief statement above is that micro and meso social relations are shaped and constrained by communal gender relations, historical power structures (i.e., Catholic Church, patriarchy, colonialism) and current trends (i.e., neoliberalism, spectacular femininity). When considering power relations, an intersectional/entangled approach in conjunction with a decolonial feminist framework opens a pathway to analyze subjects omitted from (and stereotyped within) the Western discourse. Decolonial theory is the next topic for exploration.

Decolonial theory

Anti-colonial and post-colonial studies and theories have been important in framing modernity and society. These canons of thought, in addition to decolonial thought,

question the colonial legacies that “shape development, globalization, and modern subjectivity” (Asher, 2013, p. 839). Although post-colonial and decolonial discourses regularly interact, decoloniality is distinct in two ways. First, the key decolonial “thinkers” emerged outside of Europe and the West (e.g., Quijano, Mignolo, Lugones) and were not restricted to the academy (Asher, 2013). Second, postcolonial theory tends to focus on nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereas decolonial theory draws from an expanded timeline that begins in the fifteenth century and includes Spain, Portugal, and South America (Bhambra, 2014). The significance of this timeline shift is of critical import in decoloniality as it explains the relationship between modernity and coloniality.

Puerto Rican sociologist Grosfoguel (2009) explicitly argues that “one of the most powerful myths of the 20th century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world,” leading to the “misconceptualization” of a post-colonial world (p. 21). In other words, the global structures built over a 500-year period did not automatically disappear when the political and judicial systems were ceremoniously handed over to non-European powers in the mid-20th century. From a Euro-centric historical perspective, the capitalist world-system implicitly privileged economic relations over social relations; from a non-Eurocentric position, economics was but one element of a “complex package” that included a “European/ capitalist/ military/ Christian/ patriarchal/ white/ heterosexual/ male” global hierarchical world-system (Grosfoguel, 2009, pp. 17-18). Quijano and Ennis (2000) label this sweeping organizing world-system that continues to affect (exploit and dominate) all dimensions of social existence – authority, subjectivity and labor – the “colonial power matrix.”

The colonial power matrix is the living legacy of colonialism that continues to shape contemporary society in the forms of social oppression and economic structure. While colonizers were exploiting land and people outside Europe, Europeans in Europe were reaping the material and economic benefits, which bolstered the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods that resulted in modernity. Modernity became the hegemonic status quo world-system which included the notion of the civilized human versus the uncivilized (or subhuman) dichotomy defined by those in power (Grosfoguel, 2014). Humans outside the metropole (and racialized people within) were organized *de facto* in the latter category and were automatically assumed to be in need of being saved, governed, and emancipated by the powerful civilized (Grosfoguel, 2014). In our current world system, this translates to the “sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy (of the European/non-European divide) transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures” (Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 20). Argentine semiotician, Mignolo (2000) argues the development of the colonial power matrix, which includes concepts surrounding modernity such as “rhetoric of growth (progress, development, growth),” must be the basis for any discussion regarding inequality (Bhambra, 2014, p. 119).

The term used to capture the continuances of these processes and structures of domination over time is “coloniality” (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality is the logic that has outlived the enactment of colonialism (Giraldo, 2016a; Mignolo, 2011). The term coloniality is of critical import in decoloniality as it refers to “the invisible threads of power that emerge in colonial situations but extend well beyond a strictly colonial setting and period” (Giraldo, 2016a, p. 161). In sociological detail, coloniality is “the cultural,

political, sexual and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations” (Grosfoquel, 2009, p. 23). Coloniality is a powerful tool, one Giraldo identifies as “symbolic, invisible, and indelible” (2016a, p. 161). To overcome questions of legitimacy of knowledge and representing peoples from the Global South/periphery as “incapable of conceptualizing their own realities,” Grosfoquel suggests adopting radical decolonial critical theory (2009, p. 12). Mignolo (2010, np) clarifies that the decolonial project “is an invitation to organise and re-inscribe communal systems all over the world – systems that have been erased and dismantled by the increasing expansion of the capitalist economy, which the European left has been unable to halt.” This means drawing from a divergent genealogy of thought from the dominant Euro-centric discourse. In other words, de-Westernizing by questioning “Occidentalism, racism, a totalitarian and unilateral globality and an imperialist epistemology” but going further and decolonizing by confronting those who control capitalism, why capitalism is the only apparent option and how society can delink from dominant thinking and reproduction of Euro-centricity (Mignolo, 2010, n.p.). This is particularly relevant to the idea of “development” coupled with poverty, which is a direct symptom of economic coloniality. International development is a space where the subordinate are given two options: “accept the humiliation of being inferior to those who have decided that you are inferior, or to assimilate” (Mignolo, 2012, n.p.). The third option is border thinking and decolonial action (Mignolo, 2012).

Decolonial feminism

There is a staggering problem within the foundation of decolonial thought: the exclusion of women's voices. Argentine philosopher Lugones (2007, 2010) challenges this issue by extending Quijano and Mignolo's arguments to highlight the entanglement of coloniality and social oppressions, namely gender and race, noting that a normalized racial logic renders the colonial/raced woman invisible (Bhamabra, 2014) and the bifurcated concepts of masculinity and femininity are also ramifications of European colonial force (Lugones, 2010; Curiel, 2016).

Lugones created the term "coloniality of gender" and defined "decolonial feminism" as "the possibility of overcoming coloniality of gender" (2010, p. 747). Drawing from Mignolo, Giraldo (2016b) expands the definition of coloniality of gender to encompass:

an essentialist conception of gender and a rigid gender binary from which entails the reification of fixed gender norms/roles (which further accounts for the contemporary emergence of femininity as 'hyperfemininity' under postfeminism) and of heterosexuality. In the contemporary now and with regard to women (and womanhood), the 'coloniality of gender' is a by-product of local history – the struggle for women's rights in the (advanced capitalist and neoliberal) West – projected as a global design. (p. 65)

The goal of decolonizing gender is to end the static Western gender binaries that trap non-Western women in a "double bind" of being represented as either empowered in the

Western sense (“modern, neoliberal, capitalist”) or “the perpetual victim” needing to be rescued (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 65). In other words, ontologically grounded in peripheral philosophy (e.g., Global South, zone of non-being), decolonial feminism can be applied as a theoretical (and/or activist) tool to explore the colonality of gender in action. This is critical when looking at the geopolitical context of Colombia (and the West), where there is a “narrow understanding of female beauty” that is represented by a specific, spectacularly feminine look (i.e., Sofia Vergara and Shakira) that is accompanied by strict gender roles; it is this exact juncture where the colonality of gender and the postfeminist regime meet (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 65).

Five hundred years after the initial colonization began in Colombia, the systems of power have so forcefully infiltrated society that the social actors themselves (such as the interlocutors in this research and me) embody and reproduce the colonality of gender without thought. Getting to the heart of the matter, Houria Bouteldja (2017, n.p.) writes “decolonial feminism must aim to destroy the imitation of the imitation and this will necessarily be delicate work.” In response, through everyday interactions, we must explore how masculinity and femininity are being performed and reproduced in this ‘modern’ era, how colonality plays into these reproductions, and the extent these reproductions shape society. In order to demonstrate how the ‘invisible threads’ continue to shape Colombian social systems, and to work towards ‘destroying’ the reproduction of a cultural hegemony that reproduces the normalization of girls being relegated to the periphery or altogether excluded in sport, I will apply a decolonial feminist lens. As this research focuses on female subjectivity and gender relations, I will apply Giraldo’s definition of colonality. A decolonial approach challenges the geopolitical status quo of

knowledge, allows us to see where coloniality is being reproduced, and encourages the emergence of alternative possibilities.

Ruth Galván (2014) argues the problem decolonialization should strive to resolve is the marginalization of people facing multiple exclusions; she uses the example of femicides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Although women's murders in Juarez and the experiences of young women living in Chévere and Bacano cannot be reduced to a universal sameness, the decolonial approach is relevant to both topics of inquiry because these subjects have been "violated, colonized, disposed of, and used for corporate and global gains" (Galván, 2014, p. 137). If considering the placement of marginalized groups within the more recent US-led War on Drugs/Colombian conflict seems abstract, simply consider the "falso positivo" scandal; and for those still alive in the zones of non-being, substitute the word disposed with stigmatized.⁴² Subjects from the zone of non-being are omitted from public discourse but they are used and shaped to uphold the neoliberal capitalist agenda that reinforces modernity (Grosfoguel, 2016).⁴³

The colonial residues of import that create diverse oppressions and multiple exclusions for people in this research include a strict Christian-based gender order, where women are relegated to subordinate positions; an entrenched class system based on diversity of labor, but explicitly linked to racial hierarchies that privilege white/European people over non-white peoples; the exclusion of non-gender binary peoples in society

⁴² The "false positive" scandal included the Colombian army brigades systematically executing 3000 citizens between 2002 and 2008. Motivated to show superiors positive results through body count numbers, military personnel lured marginalized citizens who were typically extremely poor and living with mental conditions – drug addiction, schizophrenia, intellectual disabilities – to a new location by offering work. Once there, they killed them and presented them as FARC or ELN enemy combatants (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

⁴³ Recognizing ingrained classism and the devaluation of life among those in the popular classes in Colombian history, Giraldo (2016b) writes, "Social cleansing is as part and parcel of Colombian history as are the persecution of the left and the systematic murder of trade unionists. Yet, none of them has ever provoked even mild indignation in urban Colombian middle and upper classes" (p. 228).

enabling heteronormativity; and, powerful violent/military systems organized by men that maintain and reproduce these structures (Grosfoguel, 2009; Giraldo, 2016a). With respect to the reality that voices from the periphery (especially Latin America) have been sidelined and that the “invisible threads” of colonialism continue to shape our global systems, this paper employs a decolonial feminist framework with an approach drawn from the theory of differentiated intersectionalities/entanglements.

Decolonial theory in the academy and in this research

Decolonial theory in action works to disrupt current historical reproduction and to transcend the modern, colonial and white supremacist world. To do this, Grosfoguel (2014) suggests removing binaries, not considering everything as “natural”, and taking non-Western viewpoints seriously. The employment of decolonial theory requires a purposive extension beyond individual research projects and into the academic establishment and individual mind. Current day neo-liberal academia has and continues to greatly reap from colonialism as data was and is mined in the South and transmitted back to the Western “metropole” (Roberts and Connell, 2016). The domination of Western culture coupled with the incorporation of the English language as lingua franca has resulted in theories and publications from the North, principally the United States and Western Europe, becoming the epistemological status quo. With Western/Eurocentric modern thought normalized as universal, Southern/peripheral knowledge was rendered invisible (Asher, 2013). Through this process, metropole scientists legitimized the colonial-patriarchal order as their ontology was preached as neutral and apolitical (Hernández and Cristoffanini, 2017). Grosfoguel (2009) describes this as a repercussion

of Decartes' "non-situated, universal, god-eyed view knowledge" and recalls Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez labeling it "point zero" (p. 68). In other words, since colonialism, the scientist of coloniality (existing in a place and position of power) has been able to hide "his" perspective under the code of universalism.

In response, Grosfoquel (2011) urgently calls for a decolonization of epistemology. This plea is not new, especially among peripheral academics. Non-western thinkers have been providing brilliant ideas for thousands of years, but decolonial theory began infiltrating into Western academia in the 1960s and 1970s coinciding with independence movements in Africa and Asia, the Civil Rights movement, and the Feminist movement. The decolonial movement is not static, but continues to unfold in current time (Maldonado-Torres, 2011) and to be more compassionate and flexible (e.g., inclusive of performance and activism) in research approach and delivery than the current academic status quo (Viveros Vigoya, 2016a).⁴⁴

This research will respond to Grosfoquel's request by implementing a feminist decolonial framework as it seeks to uncover the "invisible women's world" by looking at everyday experiences, the social dimensions that interplay with their experiences, and the interconnections with dominant forces (Hernández and Cristoffanini, 2017). But, as Lugones (2010) argues, this is a praxical task:

Decolonizing gender is necessarily a praxical task. It is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social. A such it places the theorizer in the midst of the

⁴⁴ To counter this, there are Latin American feminists who reject implementing decolonial thinking within the academy because they view this space as too embedded within the colonial power matrix.

people in a historical, peopled, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppressing \longleftrightarrow resisting relation at the intersection of complex systems of oppression. (pp. 746-747)

A feminist epistemology provides the researcher with a lens with which to conduct research, however, each researcher arrives at the research question with his or her own cultural baggage and personal location within power structures that must be reconciled (Grosfoguel, 2009).

By recognizing that Western ontology is not the “point zero” center of the universe, but that my education has been situated within the Western paradigm, I must engage in the process of decolonizing my perspective. As Grosfoguel (2009) argues “An inter-cultural north-south dialogue cannot be achieved without a decolonization of power relations in the modern world” (p. 27). Power relations are not isolated to macro politics, they derive from the accumulation of individual thought, and group actions that create processes and systems of domination. I have been educated and worked within British and American academic systems, but I recognize I (we) must do better to reduce power inequity inside and outside academia (Roberts and Connell, 2016).

Connell’s and Lugones’ reflections about the power of the metropole were made clear during my data collection. For example, when I asked a Bogotá-based sociology and gender studies graduate student to share articles from her favorite Colombian gender scholars, she sent me Butler’s *Gender Trouble* translated in Spanish. I recognize that given my identity and research location, this project is at risk of data mining and committing the same colonial faults of my predecessors. It is for this reason that I am

actively engaging with decolonial theory and omitting notable sociology rock star theorists whose work is reviewed and re-reviewed through every possible lens (e.g. Foucault, Marx, Bourdieu). I follow Mignolo's (2012, n.p.) argument that there is an "urgent need to think from the problems and the history of the problem rather than thinking from theories that have been put forward to solve other problems."

I am purposefully drawing from academics situated within the Latin American gender/decolonial discourse as clearly "the past and present experiences of Latin Americans are a key, though not the only, loci of enunciation for decolonial thinking" (Asher, 2013, p. 833). At the same time, there are limitations to this and at times I must continue to draw and build on research created by established academics situated in the sociology of sport and SDP fields who, like me, work within the metropole (e.g., Hargreaves, Hayhurst, Chawansky). This research is timely, however, as scholars such as Chawansky and Itani (2017) request more diverse research on the colonial power matrix in contemporary physical culture and Darnell and Hayhurst (2011) suggest scholars embrace a decolonizing sporting praxis.

I enter the decolonial discourse with two feet in, and a metaphorical third foot out. There is much I can gain from listening to people situated in the periphery. As Paarlberg-Kvam (2016) notes:

Colombian women, particularly poor and racialized women, are best positioned to take the measurements not only of patriarchy, but also of militarism and capital accumulation, both of which rely on the gendered subordination of women to advance and maintain their domination. (p. 7)

I learned this at a young age – during my final year of high school (located in a suburb outside of Washington, D.C.) I joined the Black Student Union because I did not understand why there was a BSU on our campus. My naïve entrance into the BSU, as a white 17-year-old from the South, was a step into the complexities and nuances of race and ethnicity as social constructs, but also an awakening to the realities of structural racism and white privilege. My learnings began the moment I entered the room, as a younger classmate from Trinidad and Tobago directly confronted my presence, arguing that I spoilt the only safe black space on campus. Because of my privilege, I had never had to consider the idea of racialized space. An African-American student labeled her comment racist and argued that social change requires inclusivity. I sat awkwardly in silence for an hour as teenage women actively and respectfully debated my presence and my future membership. Although I was regularly asked for my opinion in future BSU meetings, I remained silent because I found my voice uneducated and trivial.

My entrance into the decolonial discourse is like my entrance into the BSU. This space is crucial for academics who have been relegated to the periphery and have had to learn English and adapt to a foreign system (Carvalho, 2014), and I will not always belong in this community. My role is to listen and use my privileges to bring light to peripheral academics and their theories. I also recognize Falcón and Nash's (2015) argument that the academy discourages solidarity and collaboration, and feminist scholars must earnestly work together to overcome this.

Decoloniality is operationalized in this thesis in two ways: first, in practical terms as an “epistemological displacement of postcoloniality as it has been established in mainstream academia” which is done by drawing from Latino/a thinkers (Giraldo, 2016a, p. 160); second, I pay close attention to how coloniality is enacted by individuals (i.e., shapes subject formation in contradictory ways) and how the coloniality of gender plays out through everyday interactions and social processes. By examining micro and meso social relations, I will explore the contemporary entanglements of social oppressions that reflect and reproduce restrictions constructed by macro social forces that delimit girls and women’s participation in SDP. In my analysis, I consider the words and actions of the individual and her family member, plus her position and the SDP organization’s placement within local and global politics. The following chapter builds on this framework by introducing the research methodology and my social positioning as a researcher.

Chapter 5

METHODOLOGY

The human experience is multifaceted. Gender roles and responsibilities, social markers, symbols of status, and even how gender is performed, varies between cultures, and can be modified over generations. Qualitative research is a means to unearth and explain social phenomena such as the social construction of gender. To do this, researchers decode the meaning and interpretation of words and circumstances within specific social and geographical contexts (Liamputtong, 2008). The intention is to gain an understanding of the situation from the perspective of those being studied (Liamputtong, 2008), which is often a marginalized community, for example young women in sport (e.g., Brady, 2005; Chawansky, 2011; Hayhurst, 2011, 2013; Meier, 2005; Saavedra, 2009).

My project was qualitative for two reasons. First, the research design was based on similar projects where the researcher explored social change through sport (Brady et al., 2007; Brady and Banu Khan, 2002; Forde, 2009; Hayhurst, 2011; Jeanes, 2013; Spaaij, 2011, 2013). Second, I drew from Yin's (2009) case study design, because in his argument, a qualitative design is appropriate if the researcher seeks empirical findings, the location of the research is a natural setting, and the topic being researched concerns a phenomenon occurring congruently with contemporary events. Through the "subjects' own perceptions" I strove to analyze a social shift in gender relations that coincided with the program offered by the local SDP organization (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p. 2).

Despite progress in anthropology and sociology demonstrating the importance of qualitative research (e.g., works by Zora Neale Hurston and Erving Goffman), this

research methodology is questioned and criticized for researcher subjectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Liamputtong, 2009; Madden, 2010). The researcher's role is complex as their motivation and vision "is inevitably shaped by our theoretical climate, the people and questions that interest us, and our own experiences, predispositions and foibles" (Madden, 2017, p. 93). The researcher takes a great deal of time preparing for the research and makes sacrifices in her or his own life to become immersed in another community; they are to demarcate invisible boundaries and maintain reflexive journals to prevent "going native" and bias. The position of the ethnographer is contradictory (Dweyer and Buckle, 2009). We are to find belonging in the community being researched in order to record and represent voices of the people being researched, thus "violat[ing] the canons of positivist research [to] become intimately involved with the people we study" (Bourgois, 2003, p. 13). We are also to be unbiased critics of said community.

An adaptable and committed researcher is indispensable in the process of making sense of the complexity of the human experience. For example, in *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in the Barrio*, ethnographer Bourgois (2003) describes the social and economic dependency of the Latino and African American communities on illegal drug sales in East Harlem. His work demonstrates the critical nature of qualitative research, particularly as 20 to 40 percent of men within these communities are unrecorded by the government census (Bourgois, 2003). Without a qualitative approach, these men's stories would be unheard and the realities of their social situations unknown. Along a similar vein, the author of *Chasing the Scream* (Hari, 2015) applied ethnographic methods to explain the language and racist tactics that sold draconian drug policy to the American public. These are two examples of how statistics and numbers alone are insufficient

measures to answer questions of extent, meaning, and significance (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010).

In their texts, both authors exposed the importance of context and human emotion, critical elements for understanding the internal logic of social systems. They did so by living among or working closely with the ostracized. Experiencing everyday mundane interactions and putting faces to statistics allow us to move beyond stereotypes. Moreover, social class, race and gender are entangled. Navigating their meaning and interrelation necessitates a strategy of immersion; one that requires the researcher to be a part of the daily routine of those being researched (Brewer, 2000; Yin, 2009).

Through interaction and reflection, the researcher becomes the research tool and intermediary (Pachirat, 2009). They develop an explanation of the processes that led to the situation under investigation from the people who are “silenced, othered, and marginalized by the dominant social order,” and then translate these findings into themes, stories, and theories for a broader audience (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2005, p. 28; Liangputtong, 2009). Qualitative research then becomes imperative for policy creation and for a more reasonable documentation of human history. Omitting qualitative research is to recognize our world as monolithic; it further separates the privileged voices from an already pervasively voiceless population.

Like the literature addressed above, fear, stigma, and access were common issues in my project. I questioned if young women’s participation in sports programs located in disadvantaged communities could transform gender relations. I sought voices of marginalized Colombians; many of whom were internally displaced by conflict. I wanted to know what gender means to people who have always lived in a society where men and

women tolerate and reinforce gender discrimination and what it means for young women in this society to participate in a physical activity or sport. To know this, I needed to immerse myself—to physically and emotionally be there—to laugh and play, to feel fear and discomfort, to read people's expressions and listen to their words, said and unsaid. To understand the puzzle pieces, how they fit together, and the series of images that the puzzle belongs to, I needed to go to Colombia.

Colombia continues to combat a stigmatized reputation internationally. To conduct six months of ethnographic research in Colombia, I had to wholeheartedly invest myself. I became dogmatic in this pursuit: I fought my university's ethics committee; in Australia, I hired and personally paid a Colombian tutor to teach me colloquial Spanish; and once in Colombia, I spent one month living with a Colombian family. Beyond personal investment, I needed willing and open interview participants.⁴⁵

Colombia as the research location

Colombia was not a preconceived goal for my field research destination. My research and academic background is in Sub-Saharan Africa. English is my native language and I have worked in French. Furthermore, moving geographic locations and learning a new language for a Ph.D. would be a challenge. Colombia made too much sense to ignore. Due to its location, the social construction of football and gender, the history of the SDP

⁴⁵ I sincerely appreciate the openness of many interlocutors, like Marco: "No. Many thanks to you because, as they say, I like to talk, I like to express myself. It is something that comes from my heart and wherever you go with the recordings [of this interview], these videos, it is an example of how I left drugs and drug addiction. I'll give an example so that young people do not follow the wrong path, but follow the right path. For wherever you go, you have this recording... something written to hear the voice of a young man who left many problems in the past doing well, not badly, giving an example to your family, to your brothers because this is the life of your families and your brothers. (Previous Participant, Chévere, Marco)

movement there and the paradigmatic status of the case organization itself, Colombia met my research requirements and revealed itself as the ideal research location.

Latin America is largely absent from the SDP conversation. This is expected since SDP organizations are colonially linked to donor nations and English is used as the lingua franca for Global North academia. It also reinforces the metropole of knowledge that excludes most of the world's population (Roberts and Connell, 2016). To better understand these programs within varying geographical and cultural contexts, Saavedra (2009) called for diversity in research. I considered the Pacific Islands, a more practical location in closer proximity to Australia, where I am based. However the Pacific Island programs were too young for my research design goals. After narrowing down organizations by continent, region, approach, and status, I found VIDA and reconfirmed its paradigmatic reputation, with Colombian academics within the country.

Colombia presented itself as the best research location because of its social extremes relevant to my question: a patriarchal society (Sara-Lafime, 2013) and the gendered nature of sports. As discussed in chapter one, the third criterion for my research was the creation and expansion of the SDP movement, which took place in the mid 1990s. Ultimately, Colombia was selected because of the case organization. A case study design complemented my research question as it provided a lens to view “a social phenomena specific to a time and place” and permitted me to focus on the details of micro and macro social relations (Ragin and Becker, 1992, p. 2). McCall (2005) notes:

Case studies and qualitative research more generally have always been distinguished by their ability to delve into the complexities of social life—to

reveal diversity, variation, and heterogeneity where quantitative researchers see singularity, sameness, and homogeneity. (p. 1792)

Flyvberg (2006) argues that a case study framework allows exploration into “real life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (p. 235); which, for the researcher, provides context and meaning to the study (Yin, 2009). This framework was ideal as I conducted in-depth research concerning social transformations, which required me to immerse myself within the social context.

My research design required a paradigmatic approach. The paradigmatic approach is used in a situation where a model example influences a larger population (Hamm and Spaaij, 2017). Flyvberg (2006) explains this as “cases that highlight more general characteristics of societies in question” (p.232). In the context of the SDP field, the paradigmatic approach was appropriate because the number of well-established and financially secure organizations available for this research is limited. Exemplary SDP organizations share best practices and mentor smaller and newer organizations. In this design, it is believed that if change is not occurring in the scenario of the exemplary, then it is unlikely to exist in the environment of a less-stable organization. The NGO selected qualifies as paradigmatic, however the details that qualify it are withheld for reasons of anonymity.

I also implemented a most similar, multiple case study design as there were two comparable cases with one slight variable (George and Bennett, 2005). For purposes of this research, one SDP organization was recognized as paradigmatic within the field. The multiple units of study were two of the organization’s operational locations: Chévere, the city, and Bacano, the coast. These two locations are among the oldest within the

organization and were also located in areas deemed secure for travel by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Travel. A third location was considered, but its proximity to conflict, made it nonviable.

Data collection: Research design and methods

The research design selected for my project aligned with a qualitative methodology. In the section explaining my reasoning for selecting Colombia, I addressed why a paradigmatic, most-similar case study design was selected. I also engaged with an ethnographic design. A case study design and ethnography can be complementary. Ethnography is well suited to study culture when the research subject is restricted to an organization. An organization or groups within an organization become the case study.

An ethnographic design allowed me the flexibility to explore the cultural phenomena of gender relations in relation to sport and the capability to do this through the voices of local community members, especially the young female participants (Liamputtong, 2009). I knew from previous work and from relevant literature that experiencing local social pressures was critical in my attempt to understand the participants' lived experiences (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000; Liamputtong, 2009). This strategy permitted me to place these individual experiences within the framework of micro-, meso-, and macro-social relations. Table 1, Indicators of Transformation(s), shows the categorization of topics and how they were measured. To strategize for my fieldwork, I created this table drawing from themes found in peer-reviewed literature concerning women and sport and Sport, Gender and Development (SGD).

Table 1: Indicators of Transformation(s)

Indicator	Anticipated Measurement	Research Method	Detail/Example
Language	Anecdotal	Interviews, document analysis	What words were used to describe female athletes in the past versus the present?
Body posture and body position	Anecdotal	Interviews, Observation	From Young (2005) and from Brady's (2005) research in Kenya
Access to Space	Anecdotal/ documented	Interviews, document analysis, observation	Organizational data and observations revealed the number of girls compared to boys participating, where they played and the gendered nature of space.
Social roles of girls/boys and women/men	Anecdotal/ documented	Interviews, document analysis, observation	As determined through interviews and observations.
Access to social networks	Anecdotal	Interviews, observation	Compared the social networks and opportunities of participants to those who did not participate, and to those who participated (or did not) at the beginning.
Female habitus	Documented	Document analysis	Little data available on issues concerning gender equity such as pregnancy rates, age of first pregnancy, marriage age, and partner's age.
Education	Documented	Document analysis	Compared gender ratios in schools, completion rates, and numbers in daily attendance.
Female workforce	Anecdotal/ documented	Interviews, observation, document analysis	Questioned how gender roles have changed (or not) over time inside and outside of the home.
National law	Documented	Document analysis	Researched government policy and law regarding gender in the workforce and gender-based violence.
Customary law	Anecdotal	Interviews, observation	Discussed and observed the nature of customary law, and the lack of implementation of national law.

The research methods that aligned with my design included interviews, participant observation and document analysis. These methods provided me with a flexible approach to research and allowed for researcher reflection. Specifically, these methods enabled me to devote detailed attention to “local understandings and knowledge” (Kay 2009, p. 1190) and “voices, experiences and meaning-giving processes of the people being studied” (Spaij, 2011, p. 7).

Interviews

Interviews are a cornerstone of ethnographic research. When conducting an interview, the researcher can interpret the meaning of words with more information, since expressions, body position and tone of voice can be observed (Madden, 2010). As I set out to understand significant experiences in the participant’s lives, interviews were based on the life-history method with a semi-structured and open-ended format. These were ideal interview approaches because they encourage open dialogue and storytelling (Atkinson, 1998). Semi-structured and open-ended interviews allowed me to subtly guide the interview, while giving the participants autonomy to respond at their discretion (Madden, 2010).

All interviews were conducted in Spanish. The same format was used in each interview, but questions were adjusted depending on the background of the participant. The seven interview topics below provide examples of guiding interview questions.

1. Introduction to participant: How long have you lived in this area? Where did you live before? Please describe your role or daily activities. What is your association to sport (and to football)?
2. Introduction to the game: Please paint me a picture (verbally) of the first time you played sports (e.g., time period, location, who was involved, how did it feel, etc.)? What is your relationship to sports (football) today? Is anything different between the first time you played and today?
3. The program: How were you introduced to the organization? What was your experience with the organization? Do you believe it has influenced the community? How? Has it influenced gender relations in the community (for example, the idea of what a young woman can accomplish, or the relations between men and women)?
4. Participation and gender: Is there such a thing as a girl's sport or boy's sport? Why and in which sports? Are female and male participants/athletes (e.g. football players) treated the same by the community/society? How did you feel about female football players (past/present)? Are girls who participate in VIDA different from girls who do not, why/not? Has your view always been the same? Can you give me examples? Do you feel that everyone shares your opinion about girls playing sports? Why/why not? Do boys and girls have different toys? Can boys play with girls' toys? Can girls play with boys' toys?
5. Perception: What kinds of comments/labels do you use/hear to address female athletes (football players) past/present? What do these words mean? How do you perceive these words and why? How do you believe the community perceives

girls who play football? Can you give me examples? Do you think there have been any changes/issues in your community because of girls' playing football? What/how?

6. Gender roles in the community: Are there specific roles/expectations girls/boys and women/men fulfill in the community? Are these interchangeable? Have these roles shifted/changed within your lifetime? Can you give me examples? Why do you think they have/have not shifted? How has this impacted your life?

7. Closing: Do you have more stories you'd like to share? Do you have questions for me? May I contact you if I have further questions?

I began my interviews by talking with the organization's staff members and youth leaders. In both research locations, the emotional distance between the communities and me changed when introduced by an employee of the organization who was one of my gatekeepers. In the safety of the office, a home or on the field, faces lit up with smiles and stories were openly shared. Positive stories dominated conversation as people addressed their challenges; they always remained hopeful. Yet many participants' responses and questions were minimal; it was only through examples and negotiation that more details flowed; sometimes this was impossible.

Attempts to branch out beyond this group proved challenging because of the location and my security protocol. My interlocutors outside of the program were people I met during my daily routine: social workers, taxi drivers, parents, and shop owners. Many questioned me and what I was looking for. Locals in Chévere have survived a lot of trauma and many do not have a formal education. From our

conversations, it appeared they are rarely asked for their opinion or story. The *falso positivo* scandal had occurred in this area and areas like it. It is uncommon for outsiders, like me, to enter unless seeking “something.” Although casual conversation was easy and comfortable, once I pulled out my consent forms, many interview participants not connected to VIDA became cold and/or awkward, and some responded that they no longer wanted to chat.

The challenges were different in Bacano. Having been frustrated with the physical distance between my living and working spaces, I questioned moving into a borderline neighborhood located in a safer section on the outskirts of the research neighborhood. However, this potential move made the VIDA employees nervous and the employees (not participants) strongly recommended against it. I respected their request and shared a room in a home owned by a vibrant single Colombian man in a wealthier section of the city. Although I instinctively felt more comfortable in Bacano, my gatekeepers, who were mostly social workers, plus coaches and leaders, were stricter about my security. They walked me everywhere, always double-checked that I arrived safely, and noted any valuables I may have carried. The staff regarded everyone’s safety as a priority. In addition, the maturity of the leaders and the abundance of student social workers meant I continually had someone within sight, but never had to negotiate this space or wonder if they were influencing the interview. The staff encouraged me to take private motorcycles, but I felt taking the bus was an important part of my routine and physically safer. Taxis were five times the cost and would further separate me from the local population.

Finding interview participants in Bacano was as easy as sticking my head out of VIDA’s front door. Instead of searching for people, I had to limit the number of

interviews I could conduct per day. The laissez-faire Costeño attitude created long waiting periods. I vented this frustration in my notes:

In [Bacano] I have found it easy to arrange interviews but hard to pin them down. For example, yesterday I waited for three hours at the university to speak to an academic and was told to call her and maybe meet her the next day. She said she didn't remember me. I'd had this planned for three weeks. This was the second time I'd waited for three hours. This time I was bounced between offices. They said they didn't know her, then she'd be there at 2:30, then no, she had class, then 3, then asked is tomorrow okay? (Field notes, Bacano, September)

Interviews in Bacano often required a significant amount of my time talking and texting with locals to organize. Often, the interview would be cancelled.

Purposive sampling

Since the goal of qualitative research is to determine meaning, it was imperative to have participants who were strategically selected. In purposive sampling, individuals are selected because they fulfill specific criteria relevant to the research (Liamputtong, 2009; Bryman, 2015). In my project, interviewees were selected based on two primary conditions: their involvement (or lack of involvement) with the sports program, and the role they held in the community. In this circumstance, most participants could walk from their home to the field in less than 15 minutes, resulting in regular (a few days per week) interaction with the organization. This research required an interview sample from

numerous social demographics. A generic sample of the 60 (30 per location) people interviewed included, but was not limited to, young adults currently participating in the program and over 18 years of age, previously involved or aged-out participants, current and aged out participants' parents, coaches, social workers, shop keepers, and office directors. Interviews were also conducted with people who lived in the community, but did not interact with the organization. To gain perspective on the SDP movement within Colombia, Colombians involved in sport, but not associated with the organization were also interviewed. These participants included professional athletes, female athletes from wealthier social classes, and people involved with the development of SDP in Colombia.

To conduct an interview, I approached the community member, explained my project and asked if they would be willing to informally talk with me for 30 minutes about their experience in the community. Due to the seriousness of the potential topics covered in interviews such as gender and gender identity, the subjects were of legal adult consenting age (18 years). Before the interview began, I asked for informed consent whereby the participant read (or I read to them) and signed my ethics consent agreement document. Written or verbal consent (in situations where the interviewee was illiterate or blind) was mandatory. Ongoing consent was determined verbally during each interview. Participants were not obligated to answer all questions and could stop their involvement at any time. Once the interview was complete, I asked the participants if they had questions for me and if there were any concerns. I also noted that they could withdraw their interview from the project within one month.

Interviews took place within the organization's office, on the field, in a café, or in the participant's home. The location was determined by convenience and security. A few

interviews took place in neighborhoods outside of where the organization operates. Many interviews were impromptu. Due to the history of paramilitary and guerrilla groups within these neighborhoods, all participants' names and information remained strictly confidential. For this reason, pseudonyms are used and ages omitted. Only in circumstances where the person cannot be traced and age reveals a shift in social relations, is the interlocutor's approximate age revealed.

I maintained interview charts during my fieldwork, generically labeling interview participants by qualification, followed by the interview date. However, I soon found that many interlocutors belonged to multiple categories and created categories for overlapping qualities. For example, many 'young female non-players' also qualified as parents. And many grandparents or community members were aunts and uncles of players. Keeping a chart not only allowed me to track my interview numbers and social representations, but it encouraged me to better understand the familial connections and close linkages within the community.

Participant observation

Ethnography "requires the researcher to be actively involved in the field or with the people under study" (Brewer, 2000, p. 21). My research question required immersion. A more accurate term for this is partial immersion, where the researcher works to be well-versed enough in the research location so it is possible to understand the lives from the participants' perspectives, but to maintain a distance that enables the researcher to objectively analyze the data (Madden, 2010). Drawing on Bourdieu (1990), Madden (2010) argues that the task of immersion is not simple as it depends on many factors that

make up habitus, including the local context, researcher's character, and participant buy-in; "habitus is not merely a frame that structures behaviour, it is also generative" (p. 88).

Through immersion, I intended to find belonging within the organization and to do this I had to learn and consider "matters of comportment, deportment, physical attitude, stance, physical distance, purity and danger, and gender" (Madden, 2010, p. 83). Belonging allowed me to decipher slang, social code, and social customs in various social classes within Colombian culture, and furthermore, to gain trust and build relationships with community members. But finding my footing in Colombia was more challenging than expected. The class system is strict and I found myself between two distinct social worlds that did not interact: my working world and my home world.

To begin my partial-immersion, I spent my first month living with a Colombian family. The family identified as holding traditional Colombian values: they were Catholic; the mother was responsible for cleaning the home and cooking meals; the father worked outside the home and provided much of their income; their children were expected to live in their home until marriage (the oldest unmarried son was in his mid-30s). Their self-identified socio-economical status was middle class, or third out of the six-tiered class system created by the Colombian government. To them, this meant they lived a modest and simple lifestyle, which included economic security and a holiday home in the mountains.

I lived in their daughter's bedroom and in many ways, I became her stand-in. I attended family events, social gatherings, and business meetings. I shopped with the mother and listened to her opinions on my beauty flaws and the Colombian expectations of beautification. I read the newspaper with the father and practiced cultural cues, such as

hand gestures and facial expressions. I shared with them my daily wins and frustrations. By living with a local family, I learned about the class system as they knew it, but I also began to understand how fear is developed and reproduced as social stigma.

The daily interactions I had with my family reinforced the critical element to my research: ethnography. I had little autonomy under their care, mostly because of my gender but also due to Colombia's political climate and my host family's life experiences. I never left their home without sharing my destination, with whom I would travel or meet and their details, and my hour of return. Although at times it felt suffocating and unnecessary to share minute details concerning my whereabouts, it was critical in their eyes. I noted my frustration in my journal where I wrote that my host family's eagerness to protect me translated into total dependence: I could not take a taxi alone, go to an automatic teller machine, and even though I gave them an employee's name and contact details, the mother accompanied me to my first formal meeting and the father drove us. The mother came inside the office and pretended to sleep in an adjacent chair while I discussed my project. On another occasion, I wrote:

My indoctrination into being a Colombian woman is fun, infuriating, and constantly testing my patience. My looks and clothing are scrutinized (this affects my eating habits and exercise habits; I'm too skinny so salads and running are minimized). Every day I learn more about my physical faults and how to improve them to Colombian standards. Most testing, is my lack of autonomy in decision-making. Every question is a statement, for example:

Host mother: Would you like coffee?

Sarah: No, but thank you very much for the offer!

Host mother: But coffee is delicious!

Sarah: Thank you, but I don't drink much coffee and I'm good, thanks.

Host mother: But I made you coffee already and it's in a really cute mug!

Sarah: um...

Host mother: So, here's your coffee.

Sarah: Thank you!

More pertinent to my gender-based research question, however, was the everyday discussion on beauty, whereby my clothes, shoes, jewelry, hair, and make-up (or lack of) were scrutinized. Firsthand I felt and observed the Colombian ideals and social pressures of beautification. For example, I frequently woke up to the mother smiling and giggling as she handed me a homemade facemask to use before showering. Another example took place during my first week in Colombia. I went to the beauty salon in Bogotá with my host mother. I had a scheduled meeting at five with a male Colombian researcher. It is out of character for me to go to a beauty salon to begin with, but I thought it would benefit my research and be a good bonding moment with my host mother. The conversation reveals the expectations of me, as a woman, both in terms of my physical presentation and in my interactions with men (Field notes, Bogotá, April).

Host mother: You should do your hair to look good for him tonight.

Me: Why do I want to get my hair done for him?

Host mother: Because you'll look pretty!

Me: [responding with the intent of avoiding this conversation] I think I'm pretty.
and I have a boyfriend.

Host mother: But, you'll look prettier! He'll be impressed.

Me: But I don't want him to be impressed with my looks! I don't want to create problems with men here.

Host mother: You really should! You'll look so pretty!!! Really!

Me: NO! No! no! [smile] No, thank you.

Some of the results from temporarily losing my independence and feeling pressure to perform femininity to Colombian standards were: I overanalyzed my appearance and clothing choice incessantly. I bought lipstick for the second time in my life, the first time was when I was 18, more than 15 years ago. Daily I asked myself, do I wear clothing that is comfortable or do I wear clothing that is normal by local standards (e.g. heels, skintight pants, pushup bra)? Is it a problem that my clothes look old or new? Or, that I am not wearing makeup?

While living with the family I felt social pressure to be more beautiful and heard inconsistent messaging – women are to simultaneously attract men for social status, but they need to keep men at a distance for security. Daily, I endured internal conflict over how to appropriately respond to situations – verbally, through physical dress, or both? How a person presents themselves physically through makeup, clothes, and hair does not symbolize the individual alone, but it is often a reflection of the individual's family, ethnic background and socioeconomic status.

Understanding physical and social pressures within micro-social relations was key within this project, but I also needed to know how these immeasurable social constructs worked within meso-social relations. To do this I spent as much time as I could at the organization's office and playing fields. My daily routine involved spending long hours on public transportation⁴⁶ to reach these isolated neighborhoods, walking the streets with social workers or staff members, playing football, and coaching children. Here is an excerpt from my journal revealing the physical nature of participant observation in ethnography:

I leave my house at 6:30 a.m. four days a week to travel to the slum. As opposed to the suit-wearing Colombians at my first bus stop, I wear Adidas pants, a grey hoodie, and a camouflaged baseball hat. I always keep \$25 in my shoe, so I have taxi money in case I'm robbed. Every block on my route gets a bit more run-down with more walls tagged with spray paint. Prostitution and drug abuse becomes more noticeable. When my bus turns off the main highway, my nose lets me know I'm entering a new social world as an overpowering stench of urine passes through the bus windows and the temperature drops. At that point, I have another 30 minutes on a second bus before a 20-minute uphill walk.

An ethnographic approach permitted me to contextualize my individual experience within the local setting. This was not a simple task, but a necessary one. I saw, felt, and heard

⁴⁶ For security reasons, I could not live in the neighborhood where I conducted research. Daily, I traveled from a middle-class neighborhood to the research location. The journey on public transit reversed the journey locals took to go to work and took up to two hours per trip. These trips permitted me to feel the frustration of being on crowded, unreliable transit for extended periods.

about the challenges people living in a community comprised of marginalized people encountered, such as overcrowded housing, altitude and extreme weather conditions, and regulations enforced by local *guerrillas*⁴⁷.

To assist with integration in two different locations and in commitment to the ethnographic approach, I spent one month in each community before conducting interviews, to observe and learn about local customs, improve my linguistic skills and observe daily life. My participant observation included me playing, coaching, and helping office staff with menial tasks. I aimed for my daily routine to include experiences that would help me understand local challenges, such as taking public transit, completing errands and walking through the neighborhood.

This time allowed me the space to recognize social customs and boundaries. Through casual conversations, I could note which topics were sensitive and identify potential interview participants. By spending time in the community and with participants and their families, I had the opportunity to explain my project and to candidly answer their questions. Demarcating my role in the community was important to avoid misleading people as to why I was there (Spaaij, 2012). I also had time to become a normal part of people's days, perhaps even a boring part, which allowed me to see everyday interactions as they naturally unfolded.

Through ethnography, I played an active role in the organization. Experiences that aided in my participant observation included: managing the Chévere office so staff could attend a conference; creating videos and presentations with Bacano staff to present at a symposium; helping decorate for and participate in the monthly parent's meetings;

⁴⁷ A term used for fighter. These groups maintain order in the community as they see fit through strict invisible boundaries, enforced curfews, and taxes. They are known to recruit for larger rebel or paramilitary groups.

supporting leaders with getting sports equipment and setting up games. Sometimes these interactions involved mitigating conflict and often they included sharing life stories.

My participation with VIDA allowed me to hear voices of community members, which are shared through narratives in section 2. I firsthand witnessed the contradicting social pressures of beauty, gender, class, and race in the community: social constructions that influence micro- and meso-social relations. These experiences enabled me to contextualize these findings within macro-social relations. For example, the Colombian Constitution drafted in 1991 reads as a progressive document in reference to gender equality and there are many women visible in the workforce due to a compulsory quota system, but this is mostly rhetoric. It is only from having discussions with people on the ground and reading reports that I learned the extent by which these policies were not implemented and how, even with gender quotas, women are relegated to lower employment positions (UNDP, 2012). My participant observations will be further unpacked in Section 2 of this thesis.

Field notes and self-reflection

A critical aspect of conducting ethnography is writing copious field notes; “Because of the frailty of human memory, ethnographers have to take notes based on their observations” (Bryman, 2008, p. 417). Notes need to be written as soon as possible, with details on the context of interviews, reactions, and significant moments (Atkins, 1998). I optimistically entered the field each day with pens, notebooks, and a mobile phone, used for recording interviews. My goal was to generate notes throughout the day in my notebook and type them at night.

Taking notes while being a participant observer however, proved challenging. First, I worked in Spanish. To be an active participant in conversation and to simultaneously write notes was difficult. Sometimes I jotted quotes in Spanish, other times I instinctively translated them into English. Writing down verbatim quotations caused me to pause in the moment. If I lost the context of the conversation and the topic changed while I wrote, it would take a few minutes for me to rejoin the conversation. I made shorthand notes as best I could, but more often I took time after lunch to write and I then typed my notes at home after dinner. This process was exhausting. After my first two weeks in the field, I decided to dedicate Fridays solely to typing my notes and analyzing my week.

A critical concern was that interview participants felt safe and comfortable to speak freely. It was evident that interlocutors were less relaxed when a note-taking tool was visible. More in-depth, private conversations occurred in ordinary scenarios like walking to the field or setting up tables for lunch. Peoples' body posture and tone relaxed after the recording device was turned off; it was during this short time period that key information was shared. I too, was more comfortable when the notepads were put away and the recorder was turned off. The recording device had a life-like quality to it. Everyone was aware of its presence; sometimes we would ignore it and other times, we would speak directly to it.

Throughout this thesis, I have used excerpts from my journal and narratives that reveal the depth of detail that can be obtained from field notes. The quote below is a section from an entry written about an interview with a young man, with whom I

regularly interacted. This was my second interview and from this I re-strategized how to talk about gender, using more examples as discussion points rather than direct questions.

Today I met with Felipe in the front room of the VIDA office where no one could hear us. We sat in black chairs in the center of a room, surrounded by stacked desks and dirt. He's a difficult character to figure out. He spoke quickly and I'm uncertain whether he really answered my questions. I suppose that I'm uncertain whether the young man really, *really* understood what I'm trying to do. I think he didn't want to speak on behalf of the community, and wanted to show that he is *different*. I tried multiple times to get more information about general gender relations, but it wasn't easy. I get the feeling that he wants a job, so he does whatever '*they*' want. He's had a few opportunities traveling abroad with the organization. He volunteers four days a week without pay and will soon go to [a location] for a conference. (Field notes, Chévere, May)

When reading this paragraph, I remember his overconfident tone, and his hesitation to speak; the progressive words he selected to label young women and his refusal to define the word *marimacha*⁴⁸, noting that he was not like other men in the neighborhood. His tone and comments surprised me. In chapter 9, I will expand on Felipe's character, comparing the contradictions between his interview responses and his observed behavior.

Writing detailed observations was crucial for my project, but equally important was self-reflection. Charting my sentiments and position in the organization helped to clarify researcher bias and to uncover my insider/outsider status. At first, I found myself

⁴⁸ Marimacha is an offensive term that means tomboy or lesbian. It is further explored in chapter 9.

trying to compare poverty among places where I had previously worked and lived. Journaling assisted me with learning about my assumptions and level of exhaustion. I will expand upon my social positioning in the final section of this chapter.

Document/media analysis

The document/media analysis method involved analyzing gender through written texts such as reports written and produced by Colombia's Administrative Department of National Statistics (DANE), reports produced by Profamilia, an NGO that provides sexual and reproductive health services, and local newspapers, and reports drafted by VIDA. In addition to reports, I took note of the discourse surrounding women in newscasts and popular television shows. I hoped that the most poignant documents would come from VIDA. To my disappointment, the organization did not record extensive details on participants. From the documents I was given, I discovered VIDA did not begin to note how many children regularly attended, their age, and gender until 2014. During my observations, child attendance numbers were often creatively interpreted. There was no data concerning teen pregnancy and program dropout rates. The recording of data was initiated for outside donors and I do not trust the validity of this data.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were used during formally organized interviews; however, due to cultural sensitivity, this was not required of all interviews. The data collated from each program was professionally transcribed by a Colombian woman. To prevent language misunderstandings, I read through each interview aloud with the transcriber. During these

sessions, we discussed tone and colloquialisms. I was responsible for all translations. Initially, all data were systematically analyzed based on themes drawn from decolonial feminist theory, such as internalized oppression (e.g., consent to the performance of coloniality), gendered language and its relationship to history, and the hegemonic narrative that accepts/tolerates/justifies subordination with relation to access to space and gender roles.

Themes were identified inductively during data collection and through a second analysis using NVivo 11 software, which assisted with thematic analyses and identifying patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, themes included homophobic language and the entanglements of class, religion and gender. For language, I analyzed the words used to describe and address female athletes in Colombia (e.g., athlete, lesbian, and tomboy). These words were analyzed in relation to the person who said them (e.g., young male participant, grandmother), the context (e.g. in a story describing participation, upon being asked) and the person's interpretation of the word's meaning (e.g., a derogatory label, term of endearment). Afterwards, similar statements related to the theme were open coded, such as perceptions of girls who play sport versus perceptions of girls who do not. All of the statements under this code were then coded a second time to further categorize the statement. For example, language variance between players, parents and non-associated community members was compared. I then coded the transcripts line by line, before translating specific quotes and passages.

Once I began to understand broader themes that would frame my research, I re-read interviews that were connected, such as a female participant's interview and her mother's interview. The interviews were conducted on separate days, but by bringing

them together through a narrative analysis, I was able to connect accounts of the past and present and compare generational trends in thinking. This method, which I use to explore the data and to expose the legacies of colonialism throughout the thesis, allows me to build on the life history interview method and shift the focus from “what actually happened” to “how do people make sense of what happened?” (Bryman, 2008, p. 557). Identifying the critical importance of situational context, and enablers and constraints of social resources, interviews with female participants, female participants’ parents, and observations collected with those individuals were analyzed through a narrative analysis (Chase, 2005). A narrative analysis is employed in this paper with the goal of providing the reader with explanatory stories of the agency and structure debate within this specific context (Polkinghorne, 1995). This analysis allows me to elicit information from the life history interviews and organize it in way that provides the reader with a richer understanding of the context and interconnections occurring within the community.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ I must also admit that for me, this writing style is extremely powerful because it allows the reader to submerge into the scene, while exploring multiple senses. Inspirational sociological writers who employ narrative style include Matthew Desmond of *Evicted*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes of *Death Without Weeping: The violence of everyday life in Brazil*, and Loic Wacquant of *Body&Soul*.

Chapter 6

BUILDING AN IDENTITY IN COLOMBIA

My Social Positioning

Together with the Catholic Church and the military, the institution of sport is arguably one of the last bastions of male chauvinism (Anderson, 2009; Messner, 2007). From community sports to international mega-events, girls, young women, and women experience discrimination that is socially accepted as normal and reinforced by the hegemony. Although discrimination looks and feels different depending on the culture and location, it is easily transferred onto the female athlete. My social positioning and motivation for this project is personal as it grew out of my identification and experience as a female athlete. I know the feelings of shame, embarrassment, fear, and frustration, but also feelings of success, camaraderie, joy, and hope—the packaged deal of being an outsider or contrarian for doing nothing more than being born female and wanting to participate in sports.

The passing of Title IX in 1972, the US amendment barring discrimination on the basis of sex from any program receiving federal funding, changed the trajectory of my life. Previous generations of girls and young women in the United States were limited to socially acceptable gendered sports like cheerleading. Two nights a week and on Saturdays, I met with my squad of girlfriends to slide, kick, tackle, yell and laugh. I identified as a football player; I swapped the skin-revealing cheerleading uniform of generations past for a t-shirt and shorts. Through this role, I began my journey with feminism. At university, men's sports teams took priority over women's. Field times for

the women's teams were less convenient and not conducive for fan attendance. When a scheduling conflict arose between the teams, the less valued (but better ranked!) women's team played on the unmaintained training field. Equality without equity went unquestioned until 2003, when my team hired a feminist coach. He refused to accept the status quo.

During my childhood and adolescence, the media rarely presented relatable female role models (unlike my brothers who had *Sports Illustrated*⁵⁰ and ESPN) and the financially unstable women's professional sports leagues had little to offer in terms of a secure future. Although there are more avenues for female athletes today, I continue to hear ubiquitous arguments justifying inequality in sports like, "men are stronger and more interesting to watch" and "men generate more money" (for sociological examples of both positive and negative outcomes of females' participation in sport, see: Anderson, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Messner, 1990, 1998, 2007). Figure 2 below shows examples of unsolicited comments I have received over the years that reveal gender inequalities in sport.

Figure 2: Unsolicited comments

'You're good for a girl' – Nigerian man and teammate, England
 'It's so nice of you to dress as the mascot' – English man teammate's parent, England
 'Why are you dressed like a man?' – Colombian man, Colombia
 'You can't play, women can't play.' – Bolivian man, Bolivia
 'I'll go easy on you' – Male referee, England
 'Why don't you wear spandex [shorts]? People assume you're gay.' – Female opponent, Brazil

⁵⁰ *Sports Illustrated* did, however, have one issue a year dedicated to objectifying women: The Swimsuit Issue.

Journeying into SDP

In 2007 and 2008, I worked as a community development practitioner in Cameroon. My job involved teaching a business class to women and then working with my students to establish their businesses. Gendered social structures I had not realized existed were quickly unveiled. Physically entering a bank, applying for a loan, passing a police checkpoint, were ordinary tasks made difficult for women, and these daily rituals were particularly challenging for unmarried or widowed women. I found myself learning how Cameroonian women circumvent and reproduce patriarchal society. For example, I joined a “tantine,” which involved a group of friends who donate a pre-determined sum of money weekly, for one group member to take as a loan. The loan receiver changed each week.

Many of my friends could not leave their home without their husband’s permission, but as an unmarried outsider, I could. I found myself in a precarious position of privilege as I was allowed into both women’s and men’s social worlds. My friends took advantage of my status, often asking me to discuss issues that were taboo for them to address with their husbands: birth control, potential second wives, traditional medicine, HIV tests, and dowry gifts, were among the requests.

After work, I played football with men at the local high school. I had recently finished playing at the collegiate level in the United States and at that time had unbridled confidence as an athlete. My rural upbringing and as the youngest sibling and only girl in my family, it felt normal for me to be the only female player. I co-founded a girls’ football program—Breaking Ground Football (BGF), when I observed an opportunity to do so. The inspiration for the league came from teenage girls sitting on the sideline of a

men's football match, complaining of their culturally defined gender roles that they believed prohibited their participation. My skin color, nationality, and access to money made me an outsider, a third gender.⁵¹ I was a woman able to play football with men. I was not held to the same standards as Fulani Muslim women. Since most of my time was spent with women, I understood the young women's plight.

To rebel against social custom could have major ramifications. In this remote area, women and girls have little autonomy. They are prohibited from going outside their home without their husbands' or fathers' permission, leaving them isolated from their communities and one another. It is not uncommon for girls as young as 15 to enter arranged marriages and for girls far younger to take on enormous household responsibilities. Many girls never attend school or they drop out when their work at home grows too burdensome. This situation in Cameroon was not an isolated case, it is one I have seen time and time again: the boys being encouraged to be free, strong and loud on the field, and the girls relegated to sit quietly on the sideline in support of the boys.

A Cameroonian colleague from the Delegation of Sports made a radio announcement inviting coaches and players. We had participants for six teams. Before becoming an official league, the future participants, on their own accord, walked door-to-door to speak with local patriarchs, while bravely crossing invisible social boundaries to address their interest in sport and to confront potential social stigma. The league, sanctioned by the girls' fathers and husbands and endorsed by local leaders, became controversial and popular. I remain a contact for the BGF leaders and we do share ideas from time to time, however, I have not pursued exposing the league to the SDP

⁵¹ "Third gender" is a term used by Western female researchers (Schwedler, 2006) working in social or geographical contexts where it is assumed their access would be denied due to their sex. However, since their representation of gender is foreign, they enjoy extended access within the society.

movement. The founding principle of the organization is that ideas and projects must be self-identified and supported by the community. The league belongs to the participants, not me, and I know they seek external support when needed. They rarely request external support and when they do, it is typically for football balls or uniforms; equipment that is difficult to source in their remote location.

My disillusion in development work, or more specifically the development industry, coupled with this experience motivated me to return to academia where I realized an entire sector of international development called Sport for Development and Peace had arisen. By then, it had received international recognition from the United Nations (UN, 2013) and the number of organizations and programs were rapidly growing. Discovering there was a general assumption that these programs helped in the fight for gender equality was exhilarating (for discussion concerning gender research and SDP, see Chawansky, 2011; Darnell, 2012; Hayhurst, Macneill, Kidd, & Knoppers, 2014; Kidd, 2008; Kidd & Donnelly, 2000; Levermore, 2009; Meier, 2005).

In 2012, while studying as a Rotary World Peace Fellow at the University of Bradford, I researched the alternations that SDP organizations had to undergo to either establish a girls' program, or to expand a boys' program to include girls. I focused my research on three organizations in Kenya: Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), Moving the Goalposts (MTG), and Vijani Amaja Pamoja (VAP). The organizations voiced similar challenges: securing a safe athletic space for female participants, recruiting female coaches, and addressing rights-based issues with participants and the local community. Performing interviews and observing these programs gave me insight into the potential of the Sport for Development and Peace movement for reaching the

individual, the family, and the community with a streamlined message, encouraging dialogue. Also revealed through this experience were gaps in the SDP conversation and the reality that what happens on the ground is not always addressed by the researcher or understood by the donor.

When I began my doctorate, I wanted to know the extent of the SDP message over time within the community, and how female participants view and potentially alter gender relations. I had seen a variety of programs with differing methodologies, goals, organizational cultures, and implementation strategies throughout Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Cameroon and the United States. Drawing from these experiences, I questioned whether young women's participation in a youth sports program, operating in a marginalized and male-dominated community, could shape or even transform gender relations. After all, the organizations had discussed making structural changes to include young women and the participants were crossing stark cultural boundaries to play; marketing stemming from the Global North promoted the girl as the solution to poverty (Hayhurst, 2011; McDonald, 2015, 2017). Could young women's inclusion, which sparks a great deal of controversy, change the perception the community holds of what a girl is and can accomplish? How do the girls themselves feel about their identity when this act contradicts the strict gender role and/or the behavior associated with the idealized woman? Is girls' inclusion in a male domain another example of questionable liberal feminism? Furthermore, can SDP eschew or minimize neoliberal criticism because of its supposed influence on gender relations (Darnell, 2012)?

Insider/outsider reflections: privilege, ethics and limitations

There are ethical issues associated with “entering the field” – entering into a setting with which the researcher has no prior relationship with the people being researched. I address ethics, limitations and my insider/outsider status at length in this chapter because I am critical of researchers – especially with my set of privileges – who study people identified as oppressed.

Insider/Outsider

There are advantages and disadvantages to the insider/outsider roles and it is important to consider that these positions exist on a spectrum and are not dichotomous. Researchers must continually reflect on questions such as:

Am I understanding this moment in the same way as my participant is? What are the barriers preventing me from doing so, or is there a barrier that would prevent me from even knowing the answer to this question? What other ways would an outsider perceive this moment? (Naaieke, Kurylo, Grabowski, Linton, and Radford, 2011, p. 153)

I recognize that nuance in this research is important and that at times because of my position as an outsider I without doubt missed key information; albeit, I also believe that my outsider position in many ways assisted in understanding the connections between macro and micro social relations that may not be as evident to an insider. As a researcher becoming socialized and learning what is ‘normal’ is beneficial as I was permitted to ask

‘dumb’ questions that an insider would be assumed to know. This allowed me to better understand local social and political dynamics.

To better understand Colombia and become aware of sensitive topics, I lived with a Colombian family for over a month. To communicate with my interlocutors, I spent months studying Spanish and focused on active listening more than speaking. I purposefully entered situations with a relaxed and flexible attitude in hopes of garnering respect and trust.⁵² I aimed to be patient and helpful rather than a hindrance to VIDA’s staff.

Despite my intentions, I clearly entered this project with extensive privileges. Issues regarding income, health insurance, and legal aid in case of an emergency were minimized because I study at an Australian institution and have American citizenship. Without even arriving in Colombia, I knew my position was grounded in power and privilege – white, heterosexual, American. These factors facilitated my ability to conduct this research. People in positions of power are more able to take risks such as conducting research in marginalized communities where violence is normative and unpredictable. Although it is possible and would be incredibly beneficial for citizens living within these research neighborhoods to conduct sociological research, it is highly unlikely due to academic processes and their social positioning. This is noted in Chapter 11 with Urcela.

Trouillot (1995) argues multiple perspective from insiders and outsiders allows a broader spectrum of voices and more full historical account to be explained. I agree with this, but I also believe outside academics must be cautious, sensitive and acknowledge our flaws. By flaws, I’m referencing researchers’ undeniable positions of power. For this

⁵² I would add that my intentions continue to be to take the information in this thesis and give it back to the community. The current CEO of VIDA is not interested in my findings and at this stage has refused to engage with me. Once I have the funds, I aim to translate my findings in brief for the office heads.

reason, I had to be even more careful to listen to a variety of voices, seek voices that are rarely heard and avoid judgement. I did not ask interlocutors about traumatic experiences, but rather focused on mundane daily interactions. I had to treat their words as precious and represent them with care, stepping back at times from my research and informally discussing key themes with various Colombians to gain perspective. It is this path that led me to contextualize my data within theories created by Latin American thinkers and to being committed to pluralizing epistemologies.

My privileged positioning as a researcher plus my security protocol, which is described below, required me to be especially aware of my 'power' that was embedded in my research practices and social interactions. For example, coloniality exposed itself in an interview where a female interlocutor asked if I could give her husband a job and another time when a female participant requested I give her money to attend a football tournament. My middle-class, neo-liberal academic experience influenced by Western feminism and my white skin color are elements embedded in my psyche and habitus. Below I will further explain my security.

Security

I could not pretend to be ignorant about Colombia's colonial past or its dark, sorted relations with my country of citizenship, the United States of America. Colombia is chiefly represented in international media by negative press and violent images. A half-century of internal conflict coupled with violent drug cartels and the United States' War on Drugs has stigmatized the nation. My journey with Colombia's stigma and my role in Colombia began with the Ethics Committee at my university. The ethics process does not

include face-to-face interaction, but due to the nature of my research and Colombia's reputation, I organized in-person meetings with Ethics Committee members. In addition to writing a thorough application, I created a detailed security plan and provided the Committee with my resume highlighting extensive experience managing projects and performing research in sensitive, cross-cultural situations and resource-limited settings (e.g., Cameroon, Kenya, and Rwanda).

In my application, I demonstrated that Colombia has undergone vast transformation, noting that *Fortune* magazine (Bremmer, 2015; Smith, 2014) stated Colombia has one of the world's most prosperous and promising economies, and *The Economist* magazine (2014) labels it "the region's fastest growing big economy." I cleared the Ethics Committee after my second attempt. Ethical reflection and clearance is critical in research. Colombia is a volatile nation and conducting research there required drawing on life experience and detailed planning. It also required the university to trust in my maturity and decision-making skills.

Ethical clearance did not mean that I could conduct my project as I wanted to. I had strict conditions such as only traveling in locations deemed as "tourist areas" by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I could not conduct research outside of Chévere and Bacano in areas where the organization implements a gender-focused methodology, and I could not live in the neighborhoods where VIDA operated.

Following the security protocol required by my research institution and VIDA, I lived in wealthier (safer) neighborhoods distanced from the research sites, could only access the communities during certain hours (8 a.m. - 4 p.m.) four days a week, and had to be accompanied by local leaders while in public. Many leaders felt this protocol

stigmatized them and their neighborhoods (Field notes, Bacano, July). In Chévere, there were two challenges with this scenario: First, the organization's employees on the ground did not believe I needed a guide and were reluctant to have someone assist me; second, the young women who loosely became my guides had challenges of their own including shyness, drug addiction and a reputation as a provocateur in the neighborhood.

I felt that this distancing, literal and metaphorical, isolated me as a researcher because I lived and worked in social classes segregated from each other by space and social stigma. I recognized these limitations in moments where potential interlocutors agreed to speak with me but refused after I had explained I needed their signed consent or when youth leaders rattled off the organization's values that sounded rehearsed and contradicted my observations. Fortunately, my research design and funding permitted me the time and flexibility for cultural immersion, where I learned from Colombians how to maintain my security.

The leaders' escorts bolstered my research in many ways. When I was with them I momentarily became a legitimized, but superficial "insider" since I had secure access to many areas of the neighborhood. Through regular interaction with leaders, we developed a comfortable rapport, where we could discuss everyday "mundane" situations in our lives. These conversations provided me with a greater understanding of life within the neighborhood. Although my connection with leaders did superficially legitimize my presence in local spaces, my connection to them – although unlikely – may have influenced interlocutors who were indirectly involved with VIDA and impinged upon my data.

As addressed earlier, the case study locations were similar in economic status and at both locations interlocutors' were accustomed to violence. However, the locations differed both geographically and culturally, which resulted in location-based challenges. My security influenced my research methods and daily routine. Before I departed Australia, I had discussed my security at length with my university's ethics committee, colleagues, family and Colombian contacts. Over many dinners in Colombia, I listened to my homestay family express their anxiety and fear for my safety when entering my research neighborhood; a place they have not and will not enter. They told me firsthand stories of violence. As easily as they empathized with the "poor" they also "othered" them.

My proactive security plans coupled with my past life experiences made me acutely aware of how I represented myself and with whom I interacted. Although I identify as cis-gendered and heterosexual, due to my "outsider" status and vocal acceptance of homosexuality, many "closeted" Colombians (inside and outside of VIDA) sought me out to discuss their experiences of being gay in Colombia. Since female athletes are assumed to be lesbians, I accepted security recommendation from Colombians and feminized myself according to local custom with hot pink nails and mascara.

Like many Colombians, especially Colombian women and those who identify as gay or transgender, my security was a recurring topic in my thoughts. In one example, I jotted down notes before I got on the bus to return home, to reengage my memory later that night. I wrote "Knifing...Fight at school...[Lourdes] coming back...Hitting on playground" (Field notes, Chévere, May). These notes demonstrate the normalcy of anti-social behavior occurring in these neighborhoods. In my extended entry written on the

same day, I address my newfound understanding of fear and risk:

I feel more fear than before. I can finally start to understand people's anxiety. You can do anything here, but there is always slight risk. The risk isn't enough to prevent you from doing something, but it's enough to always be on your mind.
(Field notes, Chévere, May)

In Chévere, my customary body language changed and I adopted customs that reflected a nervousness and lack of trust. My field notes have multiple entries that address my security jitters, "I don't smile in public, I respond aggressively to strangers, I stand beside cops or under video cameras and I walk confidently, always." (Field notes, Chévere, May) How odd it feels to personify fear without having been threatened. I wrote about these feelings and tracked how I changed over time:

One thing I frequently reflect upon is how often I think of my safety. Not here [Chévere], but everywhere. What I wear, what bag I'll bring, can I run in these shoes? Where is my money and do I have enough? Is my phone charged? (Field notes, Chévere, May)

I constantly contemplated my security, especially in terms of my role as a woman within this setting and questioned to what extent my feminist ideology and identification as an athlete contradicted the social norm.

In contrast to where I worked, I lived in neighborhoods considered class three or four, depending on the street. Citizens had access to quality education, healthcare, and spending money for clothing, dining out, and holidays. The dogs that walked on green grass in the parks were pedigreed, groomed, and on leashes. Adjacent to where I slept was a class six zone where armed guards were visible 24 hours a day. It can be assumed these residents owned multiple houses and cars. Their children attended private schools and universities, frequently in the USA. Their access to money was likened to celebrities or the top 1 percent in the world. Their homes are cleaned and cars maintained by those who live in neighborhoods where I conducted my research. The interaction between class six citizens and class one or two was rare, but when it happened, the situation was highly controlled, and the lines of power and human value were clearly defined.

The areas where I worked were heavily stigmatized. “She works with the gangsters” my housemates in the city would say, to prompt me to talk about my work in Chévere when we had guests (Field notes, Chévere, May). “I’m too scared to go there,” my Colombian Spanish tutor declared when I told him I worked in Bacano (Field notes, Bacano, August). A few people asked if they could come with me to Chévere, but only to take photos and leave. A previous VIDA participant in Chévere, Lourdes, scoffed at me when I told her where I lived: “Ha! I’ve robbed people from near your neighborhood before! People from here go there to get money from people who have too much” (Field notes, Chévere, May). One of my security rules was to never take a public taxi for risk of robbery or kidnapping, and especially not from the famous Zona Rosa district. This was Lourdes’ old haunt, where fancy restaurants, shops (e.g., Gucci and Armani), and clubs light up the square.

As I bounced between social worlds, I created a social icebreaker game where I made a blanket statement such as "Colombia is safe" or "Colombia is dangerous" to new acquaintances. I tried to identify Colombians' socio-economic class by hearing their concerns and opinions on Colombia's progress and their role within it. I soon learned I could gain much of this information through appearance and vernacular alone. There were similarities in responses: few believed in the peace processes and none of them felt comfortable about letting down their guard. But the wealthy (class three and higher) responded that you could live safely if you remained in closed social "bubbles"⁵³, the safe zones, and used the organized systems to avoid the poor.

The result of working in one area and living in another was social isolation. My class, or wealth, was not something I could hide. Studying for a doctorate in a Western nation is only available for the privileged. And, more visibly, I have white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and am in visibly good health. Irrespective of the neighborhood or how people treated me, I critically saw myself as an outsider as my struggles and goals were not extremely relatable. I had access to multiple social worlds and as a foreign, white researcher, I could enter these worlds from a position of power.

In each interview, my socio-economic class was addressed straight away. "Where do you live?" I was asked before I could turn on the recorder. People looked disappointed when I said I lived across town in the wealthy area. One female leader politely argued with me: "you know you can live here." I responded, "Can I? I'd like that. But I've been told I need a chaperon everywhere I go in this area." "You do," she responded in

⁵³ The word 'burbuja' meaning bubble is the Spanish word I used in the field. I employ it here intentionally because the term 'social circle' which is more commonly used in English does not reflect the restrictions of the social bubbles I observed. Circles can be fluid, can overlap and can change over time, whereas these bubbles are restricted by social structures and normative rules that connect to identity and socialization.

seriousness, “but we’ll help you” (Field notes, Bacano, August). On another occasion, once the recorder was turned off, a local football coach not associated with the organization labeled me an outsider who was stealing from the community. He quickly transferred his judgments to everyone working for the organization: “no one likes them because they live elsewhere and focus so much on methodology” (Field notes, Bacano, September). VIDA employees in Bacano were also from one or two social classes higher, some lived closer to me, but many lived in safer zones within the neighborhood.

Language

An added challenge to this Ph.D. was speaking Spanish. I began learning Spanish in 2006. I worked as a waitress in a Mexican restaurant/bar in Colorado and played on a football team comprised of mostly male players from Central America. I took advantage of my access to Spanish speakers by enrolling in a Spanish night course at the local community college. I gained basic grammar and conversation skills. In 2010, I dated a Spaniard who was determined for me to converse in his native tongue and we regularly communicated in Spanish. I entered this project with a decent foundation and an intermediate ability to speak Spanish. I studied with a Colombian tutor in Melbourne two to three days a week for three months to learn and incorporate Colombian vernacular into my vocabulary and to build my confidence.

I am not a person who identifies as a linguist. On some days in Colombia, I flew through conversation without question; other days, especially when I was tired, I wondered where my brain had gone as I searched for words or questioned my verb tenses. To reassure myself, I personally paid to have selected quotes translated by a

Colombian in Australia to compare them to mine. To my delight, my translations were sufficient. I remain conscious that I am not a native speaker and that my ability to speak now ebbs and flows depending on how much I practice, my confidence and with whom I am speaking.

My integration into Colombian society was complicated. I lived among one socio-economic class (three to four) and worked within another (one to two), which affected my daily routine, word choice and socialization. Working with various dialects and age groups proved challenging. On several occasions, older participants in impromptu fashion invited a third person into the conversation, such as a grandchild or neighbor. I did not get the impression that responses were altered because of the attendance of the third person, but I did have to reiterate that I wanted only the opinion of the person who gave consent. Moreover, the Costeño dialect spoken in Bacano has a singsong intonation. It includes a lot of slang and jokes. Fearing I would never understand my interview participants, I began private tutorials. But my tutor who spoke English and Spanish, showing his upper-class status, had never been to the neighborhood where I worked and told me my Spanish was correct, while refusing to teach me “guttural” Spanish. A student studying social work assisted me with my vocabulary and accompanied me in the interviews conducted at the senior citizens' center.⁵⁴

Fitting in

⁵⁴ At the senior citizens center, I interviewed one of my oldest interlocutors who is blind. Mid-way through the interview he turned, touched my face and asked me to speak louder. He said he couldn't imagine what I looked like because he couldn't hear me properly. We both belly laughed when I explained my nationality and that his hearing wasn't at fault! I loved seeing him navigate the neighborhood alone without issue and watching community members share their affection for him. He had lived there all his life and brought great joy to Bacano.

I found changing my standards to fit into Colombian culture more challenging than I did almost a decade ago when I worked in Cameroon. Perhaps it was the intensity of performing gender in Colombia.⁵⁵ From day one, societies' expectations of how I dressed and with whom I associated were clear. Except for the women who lived near the VIDA office in Chévere, it was uncommon to see a woman playing sport or wearing sports clothing. But in my first case location, women wore comfortable athletic clothing like sweat suits. Many of these were inexpensively sold by the organization, which led me to believe women dressed this way because of economic necessity. The employees, however, performed femininity as was done in the wealthier areas with make-up, tight shirts and jeans, and heels. A VIDA director regularly expressed that she appreciated that I played because she wanted more female role models on the field and it is difficult to find them; a statement I cannot corroborate. Unsolicited comments about my physical appearance did impact my daily routine and physical presentation.

In reflection, although many female leaders wore active wear, I was the only adult woman in either location to regularly dress this way. In Bacano when social workers wore spandex leggings or running shorts to participate (some did not so they could avoid participation) it became a dramatic situation, especially for the ones wearing shorts, since it was their first time. To combat awkward feelings, they turned to humor; they took

⁵⁵ This comparison continues to churn in my mind. In Cameroon, I was accepted for who I was. Although I wore traditional clothing for occasions and reproduced gendered cultural greetings out of politeness, no one expected me to do so or judged me for not doing so. I was labeled an outsider and in doing so, I dropped my guard and became a comfortable insider because I could be myself. I wasn't expected to change and this was discussed regularly. For example, my Cameroonian boyfriend once said, you don't need to shave your legs if you don't want to! It means you're healthy here, but if you want to, great! This was very different in Colombia where I was expected to be like a Colombian woman, which was displayed by my host mother's good intentions of walking into my room with waxing strips before we went to the pool together. A good intention in her mind, but the action put physical pressure on me to adhere to specific ways of being a woman and in not doing so, I feared embarrassing my polite, kind and generous host family.

photos, walked a fake catwalk, and posted the images to social media. Wearing clothing designated for men was a big deal. My option beside dressing in shorts was to wear spandex pants. But with the uninvited attention I already received from men (which was normal by Colombian standards), I did not feel comfortable wearing tight clothing. Admittedly, I also wanted to show the younger girls that women are more than the dominant spectacularly feminine image that is reproduced in Colombia.

In addition to my physical presentation of femininity, I questioned how I performed gender through my body language and words. When I observed gender discrimination, I silently questioned my response. Would challenging the situation impact interlocutors' responses? Would it put me in a dangerous situation? Out of character, I let most situations play out rather than stopping the moment to question the actors about why discriminatory words were chosen or gendered actions performed. Only later, in the privacy of the office with an employee, did I further probe into the situation.

In addition to observing sexism, I was regularly sexually objectified. This did not occur in my work setting in either location, but it did everywhere else (e.g. university, street, bus stop) and most prominently in Bacano. A journal entry from Bacano reads that in a taxi ride, the driver sang to me, proposed marriage, and kissed my hand. On another occasion, I noted that I went out to dinner with my partner. At the restaurant, I excused myself to the toilet whereby the waiter promptly followed me to the back of the restaurant and expressed his love for my eyes, putting his body between me and the exit. The day my partner left, I expressly noted the change from walking in public with a man to walking alone:

The catcalls and comments have increased tremendously since [my boyfriend] left. I ignore them, but it can be annoying. On the ride over, there was a woman with a large butt walking down the sidewalk. Men were openly making comments about her body. One man approached and made a direct comment. She shook it off. A second one followed her into a store. (Field notes, Bacano, July)

On another occasion, an American friend asked: "How do you handle this every day?" "Handle what?" I responded. "We've had at least ten men comment on us in the past three blocks." "Did we?" Six months into my research, and after living in Bacano for three of those months, I no longer noticed the catcalls (Field notes, Bacano, September).

When I felt threatened or uncomfortable because of the male gaze, comment or whistle, I would analyze the situation before responding. For my security I felt that my response should be culturally appropriate, so often I made jokes to diffuse the situation; sometimes I feigned disgust. Frequently upon rejection, men would stop and turn to harass the next woman. But, on occasion men responded with an argument such as "you're in Colombia!" as if my sexual boundaries should shift to their desires; or "obviously you're smart enough to come to Colombia single"; "Colombian men are so amazing!" (Field notes, Bacano, September). The men assumed I was heterosexual, and as a woman in Colombian society, my role was to please men.

It did not take long for me to understand the specific and powerless role that women unconsciously consent to, a role I also observed during my youth in North Carolina and currently in Australia, to varying degrees. This is what second-wave feminist pioneer, Kate Millett, referred to as "interior colonizing" in her 1970s book

Sexual Politics. Interior colonizing is when women implicitly accept or even explicitly defend women's lower social status; this is a process where women (she's referring to white American women) embody and are complicit in the reproduction of patriarchy. In this thesis, interior colonizing is one aspect of the process of internalized oppression. Internalizing oppression from a community building, sociology and social work standpoint, is when people are discriminated against in an extreme fashion over a period of time (which may include physical and psychological trauma) and have little or no recourse to overcome the situation. In this scenario, oppressed peoples begin to believe (internalize) the stereotypes and misinformation attributed to them from those in power and to act on them. Internalized oppression can operate on an individual or group basis, though it is often employed unconsciously.

As many Colombian feminist writers have argued, this process of women internalizing their own subordination has become normalized (e.g., Forero-Peña, 2015; Giraldo, 2015, 2016a; Ochoa, 2011; Paternostro, 1999; Stanfield, 2013). Recognized as the power holders (government, Church, the household) men are protectors (i.e. decision makers) and simultaneously antagonists in women's lives. Women submit to the sexual objectification of men and women, and constantly work to beautify themselves to receive sexual and social confirmation. Without much effort, I challenged and was challenged by the strict and dominant ideology and expectations of being a woman in Colombia.

Since female athletes and coaches are a minority in society, I became an insider with the organization's female participants; however, I remained an outsider to the female staff who did not participate in sports. My identity as a cis-gendered, heterosexual female athlete challenged the stereotype of female athletes being lesbians. During my

first day in Chévere, after explaining my project to a participant, she responded, “you know it’s really bad to be gay here, right?” (Previous participant, Chévere, Lourdes). In many settings, the sporting space has become a private and safer space for lesbians in Colombia. In response to this, however, parents prevent their daughters from participating.

In addition to my class, gender, and sexual orientation, I had to be aware of what white skin represents in Colombia. Many Colombians whom I interacted with regularly noted that racism is not a problem; however, Colombian academics such as Viveros Vigoya (2013, 2015) critically disagree. Through the theory of masculinity, Viveros Vigoya (2013, 2016) explores how “whiteness” and masculinity are used as means of legitimizing power and how this infiltrates micro-private social and macro-public social relations in Colombia by racializing “power, authority and legitimacy.” The social implications of this are far reaching as Colombia is extremely diverse, ethnically and racially. A snapshot of Colombia’s citizens reveals the majority of celebrities and people in class six (singers, actors, and politicians) have skin color likened to white Spaniards. It would be irresponsible of me as a white woman to claim an understanding of the social constraints of race in Colombia since I look like the people who currently monopolize positions of power.

VIDA’s participants represented Colombia’s multiculturalism. On the rare occasion when my skin color was discussed, it was through jokes linking me to a player with a similar look. A coach or leader would jest, “Sarah, go tell your daughter to join this team.” What went unsaid, but was apparent, was institutionalized racism. Unlike many participants, the Chévere staff was predominantly lighter skinned Colombians, and

office staff was lighter skinned than field staff. Only once within my class three and higher social circle located outside Chévere did I interact with a Colombian who identified as Afro-Colombian.

I rarely saw anyone who looked like me in Bacano, but in the nearby city, many tourists were foreign with white skin. On multiple occasions, locals commented I would be protected because I look foreign. What they meant was that I would not be harmed because I am white and most tourists are white. Most tourists have money, and tourism creates jobs that provide income, so my skin color gave me a layer of protection within Bacano that a non-white person would not have.

Decolonizing myself

My constant reflection on my role as a researcher and power dynamics led me to further invest in decolonial theory and to analyze how I can do better to improve the historic research culture of the privileged researching the marginalized. It encouraged me to find academic voices that are less heard and to situate my outsider data within a broader insider conversation. My personal process of decolonialization is ongoing. It involves a daily exercise of trying to push back on social norms that include erasing women of color's voices, images and histories. This includes following women of color from different backgrounds on social media, reading publications from authors living and working outside the metropole and sharing the lessons I am learning with students in my lectures and classroom discussions. I will address this again in Chapter 12.

Section 1 set the stage for this thesis by introducing the research question, contextualizing the gendered nature of football and SDP within Colombia, providing a

literature review, explaining the research methods and justifications for said methods and ultimately exposing the researcher, imperial warts and all. Section 2 will dive into the data. Through narratives, the topics of gendered space, who can participate and why, language use and stigma, plus the performance of ambivalent femininity will be presented. Next is the topic of gendered space.

Section 2 – ¿Qué más?

Chapter 7

WHERE ARE THE GIRLS?

VIDA allows girls to access sport in a mixed-gender setting but the Chévere and Bacano field offices do not incorporate a gender-focused methodology like those commonly seen in SGD programming (such as female empowerment or gender equity). Low female participant numbers and gendered staff roles suggested VIDA and the public space where VIDA operates were gendered. However, participants, community members and staff were confused about, or not comfortable openly discussing why girls' participation numbers were significantly lower than boys' numbers when the door was metaphorically "always open to everyone" (Field notes, Chévere and Bacano).⁵⁶ This situation led me to repeatedly ask, "where are the girls?"

This chapter will investigate how space and subjects are constructed relationally through institutionalized racism and gendered and sexual politics. Space is intentionally addressed as the first inquiry theme to prime readers to better understand the research context and local social norms before diving into the nuances of entangled social relations. By beginning with the contextual complexities – social, cultural and historical – that shape and constrain space in Chévere and Bacano, I will explore how the local hegemonic culture – particularly violence – establishes and normalizes gendered space,

⁵⁶ When I began this research, I believed one of the field research locations would include a gender-focused methodology and one would not; however, due to my university's security restrictions established by the Ethics committee – the final step before leaving to conduct field work – I could not physically access the field office that applies a gender-focused methodology. To say I was concerned about my project because of this situation is an understatement. When I arrived at both field locations there were fewer girls than confirmed by VIDA in prior discussions. So, because of circumstance, I began my fieldwork repeatedly asking everyone, "where are the girls?"

which in turn reinforces girls and young women's lack of participation at VIDA. To do this, the concepts of safe space and gendered space are explained below.

Space

The term safe space has been adopted and adapted throughout history to the point where academics argue it has lost meaning, is overused, or may undermine critical thinking (Rom, 1998). The Roestone Collective⁵⁷ (2014) explains the concept of safety varies by context and time, noting "the categories of safe and unsafe are socially produced and context dependent" (p. 1350). The term space is also fluid; "It moves and changes, depending on how it is used, what is done with and to it, and how open it is to even further changes" (Puwar, 2004, p. 2). In this research, space is understood as "an imaginary construction reliant on ritualized forms of control," with control coming in multiple forms such as from parents, guerrillas, the Church, and the government (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1349).

Analyzing safe space through a metaphysical lens, safe relations, such as psychological considerations, social interactions, and human relationships that impact the feeling of being safe, must be incorporated. The United Nations Population Fund (2015) began to consider the psychological aspects by defining safe space as absent of "trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse" (p. 5). The relational aspect of safety is expanded further by Spaaij and Schulenkorf (2014) who explain safe space as a "figurative, psychosocial space constructed through social relations", which "refers to a way of acknowledging and relating to others" (p. 683). Ultimately, they define it as a

⁵⁷ The Roestone Collective is Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman. "Roestone" is an anagram of the first parts of their last names. The Roestone Collective is based at University of Madison, Wisconsin and much of their work focuses on feminist geographies.

“multidimensional process” affected by five critical dimensions: physical, psychological/affective, sociocultural, experimental, and political (Spaaij and Schulenkorf, 2014, p. 633).

Central to this chapter is framing safe space as a social construction and a dynamic process, or as Gotham (2003) articulates: “the idea that spatial boundaries, identities and meanings are negotiated, defined and produced through social interaction, social conflict and struggles between different groups” (p. 723). “Safe space relations” will be used as a key term with the goal of incorporating several considerations: the notion of non-physical violence in a physical space; a metaphorical space for unabated emotional expression; and, the relational negotiations constantly changing due to internal and external players and factors (e.g. violent groups, government legislation, and common law). The third aspect – the changing of relational negotiations – is recognized in this research as the volatile nature of the communities studied and the vulnerable positioning of participants, community members, and VIDA. VIDA’s positioning engenders an environment where participants can be safe and can also experience risk-taking. Viewing safe space relations as dynamic, constantly evolving, and relational allows us “to understand how the people who cultivate safe spaces recognize and negotiate sometimes deeply problematic differences” (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1348).

The safe space continuum is evident in both the development and wide application of the term.⁵⁸ The relational term, “gendered space” is defined as girls’ and “women’s lesser access to certain spaces, and the association of space with gender

⁵⁸ The concept of safe space is not reserved for feminist thought or application alone; it is practiced in a range of contexts, for instance in struggles for racial and sexual equality.

stratification” (Spain, 1993, p. 137). Research reveals that space assists in the maintenance and reproduction of culturally specific gendered behavior (Brady, 2005). For example, feminist geographers argue social relations are shaped by the exponential effect of (un)safe and gendered spaces coupled with ideological assumptions about gender roles (Sanger, 1995).

Public and private space in Colombia is gendered. Rodriguez (2001) argues that the conversation linking Western development with Colombian patriarchy depicts women as silent and unseen actors who gain attention through the male sexual gaze and gain purpose through their relationship to children and men. She builds her position by drawing from Thomas (1995) who posits that due to the Catholic Churches’ influence, Colombian women are categorized in relation to the Bible as “asexual Marys or over-sexualized Eves,” resulting in women figuratively becoming “decentered subjects, subjects who lack being, subjects diluted in the goals, needs, and desires of others” (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 485). Through either role in this theory, Colombian women become “symbolic mothers” whose existence in the private realm (e.g., maids, secretaries, homemakers) and public sphere (e.g., policy makers in the fields of health and education) limits them to serve others (Rodriguez, 2001).⁵⁹

Idealized femininity extends from the individual to the family through Mary. The revered patriarchal nuclear family endorses traditional gender roles: the man is the protector, decision maker and financial earner and the woman is the mother and caretaker who depends on a man’s financial support. Mary is the guardian of the home where she

⁵⁹ Gendered roles vary by social class, but even in the wealthier classes, space is gendered. For example, during her childhood, Colombian journalist Paternostro (1999) was excluded from political discussion because the subject of politics was considered men’s business; and only during adulthood did she recognize that on Friday nights once she was safely returned home by her boyfriend, teenage boys were ushered into brothels as a process of male socialization.

follows “moral code”; whereas, Eve is an independent woman moving freely in public space. Eve’s position as a woman moving freely outside her home and in public space signifies that she is seductive and “available to address men’s needs” (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 486). The coloniality of gender is unveiled in layers at this junction as we see two dichotomous biblical female characters simplified as good or bad because of their relationship to space. Their restricted movement affects their physical access and is psychologically restricting; girls’ movement in public space is associated to sexual promiscuity, which is connected to individual and family reputation. This is not hearsay from 1492. Public spaces such as offices, bars, and sports facilities are traditionally viewed as masculine spaces and unwelcoming to women (Gutmann & Viveros, 2005), but kitchens and beauty parlors are relegated spaces for women.

Subjects socialized within this patriarchal system, including the interlocutors in this research, consider spaces segregated by gender and women’s restricted access as normal. For example, after sharing lunch in a home-style restaurant in Bacano with Diego, a young Afro-Colombian man who volunteers as a leader for VIDA, he explained how his life differs from his grandparents’ lives. His response directly connected gender to space:

Yes, in the era of my grandparents, they tell me that the woman could not leave her house. If she did, it was only to go to school and to go from school to home. But now it's changed. Women have a bit more freedom in where they can visit with friends and partake in recreation. They can enjoy spaces like shopping

centers; they chat in the beauty salons and they are finding out that there are many women entrepreneurs and workers. (Participant, Bacano, Diego)

Diego highlighted a change in women's access to public space in recent history, which he correlated to opportunities for women to socialize and work outside the home. Considering the connections between neoliberalism, spectacular femininity and beauty in Colombia (addressed further in chapter 10), it is no surprise that he mentions shopping centers and beauty salons in his comment, as those spaces have always been associated as feminine spaces. Many older interlocutors noted that young women are now attending professional football games at the local stadiums, a public space previously only occupied by men as both players and spectators. This statement was often accompanied by a sigh of disappointment in the "modern" young women's behavior coupled with examples such as drinking alcohol or going to parties late into the night.⁶⁰ In other words, for many people, Mary is not supposed to attend the football game.

Cultivating safe space

In spaces where sport is played, professionally and in communities, men govern (Anderson, 2008, 2009; Messner, 2009; Velez, 2009). Men's domination is represented in physical numbers and logistical preservation. It is also reproduced in the media through the omission and minimization of coverage on women athletes and women's sports competitions. Men's actions and roles are deemed natural and reproduced as standard. This is seen in city parks, where girls and women (especially those from wealthier social

⁶⁰ I don't know when women were socially permitted to watch football games, but interlocutors referred to it as a new phenomenon. Comparing this response to their other before/after responses, I'd assume this to have occurred in the last twenty years.

classes) are rarely playing; and in the creation of the women's national league in 2017, decades after the development of the men's league. The standardization of men's occupation of sporting spaces has rendered girls and women's participation as abnormal. This is evident in academic research and in conventional colloquial expressions such as the labeling of female athletes as "tomboys" and the derogatory assertion "[run, hit, kick, play] like a girl," which means to do something relating to sport, but execute it poorly.

The cultivation of safe space is paramount to any community-focused activity and especially for programs operating in spaces where social exclusion is standard and where violence is normalized. It is in newly cultivated safe spaces that participants can practice an alternative existence as they can perform in ways that may not be accepted elsewhere (Hunter, 2008). There, participants (and to some extent community members associated with VIDA) can take risks without the detrimental ramifications that they would potentially encounter from taking the same risk outside of the organization. The creation of safe space relations is a complex, multidimensional process that requires planning, deliberation, and adapting to continuous change.

In spaces, such as Chévere and Bacano, where violence is normalized and social stigma is used as a tool to manipulate and denigrate, the cultivation of safe space relations is a critical element for VIDA's existence and continuation. VIDA works proactively to maintain safe space relations. To mitigate factors that dissect the community, VIDA employs an organizational culture that reflects key elements of Paulo Freire's (2005, 1972) theory of critical pedagogy: the establishment and process of maintaining a nurturing environment (i.e., program culture) that enables participants to question knowledge; the ongoing practice of expressing empathy, respect, and tolerance; and, a

mission to create social change through collective action (Oxford & Spaaij, 2017). Although sport is a key methodological component, VIDA does not promote competition, but encourages ludic play and participation.

The organization wants their internal culture to be replicated by participants and leaders, such as Valentina, who commented that as a leader she strives to set a good example and be a positive role model (Field notes, Chévere, June). VIDA staff also leads by example while teaching soft skills (e.g., conflict resolution and problem solving) with the hope participants will be better equipped to handle routine stressors:

[Our hope is] when they come across very strong people (threatening), very coarse people, the child will be very strong and nothing will happen. Like, the interaction will be nothing (inconsequential). With good character and good sympathy comes success...It is important that VIDA [staff] generate trust and be very human (authentic). (Staff member, Chévere, Julio)

An example of how VIDA fosters a safe and supportive environment where participants can take risks without extreme consequence was observed when a Chévere participant, Yuliza, cut her hair short, rebelling against normative rules of femininity. Short hair is correlated to homosexuality, which is openly condemned by most Colombians and frequently leads to social ostracizing. When asked about the community response to her difference in appearance, she noted “Yes [people say negative things], but I will not be bothered by their comments.” Then she confirmed that her true friends are at VIDA and are supportive. Yuliza’s response and attitude towards VIDA was shared by many and

corroborated by a Chévere staff member, Lorena, who valued participants' feelings of being "accepted, loved, listened to, oriented."

VIDA employees encourage participants to replicate the internal culture of tolerance and acceptance when they are outside of the organization, and they proactively work to build positive relationships through collaboration with local community members and businesses. Community investment includes improving infrastructure in physical space and providing psycho-social support. For example, upon the inception of the Chévere field office, staff realized many participants and their families were without sufficient food. In response, participants were given bread rolls after playing: "Many children here in the sector did not have breakfast, and at some point, we gave bread and soda and that became the children's breakfast...Many of them still receive bread and take it to share with their families at breakfast." (Staff member, Chévere, Gloria Laura). Participants in Chévere continue to receive bread rolls and water and participants in Bacano receive water, popsicles and fried pastries.

The VIDA staff extended their services to parents through monthly meetings where parents play games and discuss VIDA's learning activities, such as how to mitigate conflict without yelling (Field notes, Bacano, August). A Bacano staff member, Liliana, discussed the purpose of the meetings and interactions:

We hold family gatherings, like school for mothers and fathers. The idea is that their parents should also become involved in this process of prevention and promotion of the social development of their children. The parents are participants, but also contribute their knowledge to improve and strengthen their

children to reach their potential... if we do not do anything with the parents, then we are not doing anything... And when home visits are made in children's homes, we discuss some of the topics of interest that we work with here and are evident issues within the home: conflict resolution, parenting guidelines, effective bonding...all these issues we work with: prevention of violence, child abuse, so they get to know about them. It is easier and more practical to work together with the family.⁶¹ (Staff member, Bacano, Liliana)

Activities promoting social change with families do not go unnoticed by participants. For example, after being questioned about VIDA's role in the Bacano community, Diego discussed social relationships in relation to VIDA's outreach:

Previously there were only a few families that were united because the rest were in constant discussions or fights. [But since VIDA came] that [fighting] has been decreasing a little. The workshops for parents deal with the issues of intra-family relationships...They do home visits in hope that it's not only at [VIDA] that the children have a harmonious space, but they hope they can live in a quiet way in their homes somehow. They also are trying with the educational institutions; the schools that are close to [VIDA]. They intervene and discuss methodological and pedagogical tools to prevent physical or verbal aggression, because we know cases where teachers aggress children and we want to change that behavior. (Participant, Bacano, Diego)

⁶¹ I attended two *escuela para padres* meetings while in Bacano. Approximately 50 mothers attended.

VIDA provides basic support in various ways to local families who regularly experience stress. For example, VIDA uses their office to hold affordable clothing sales (e.g., second hand clothes from the United States) and to host appointments from medical specialists, like optometrists. Other benefits include sharing information concerning “subjects of [human] rights, how to consult with a lawyer, [and] on which terms to seek advice” (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena). Locals who volunteer also gain access to VIDA’s Internet and work closely with staff.⁶²

The result of VIDA’s cultivation of a safe space is the creation of internal safe space relations that sharply contrast with relations in public spaces. A staff member in Chévere, Gloria Laura, discussed VIDA’s internal culture and efforts:

On our playing field, there is no sudden verbal aggression. Physical violence is not present in the way it occurs in schools, and in closed organizations. We are an open organization where there has never been a person injured by a bladed weapon, nor have we had to call the police to intervene in a conflict. We have been working for [many] years in the community, and no one can say: *in VIDA they have called the police!* (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

In addition to cultivating relationships, VIDA staff invests in local infrastructure. For example, in Chévere VIDA introduced phone lines to the neighborhood, as Lorena recalled:

⁶² In Chévere, VIDA staff presented appreciation awards to volunteers who assisted with the leader training course. A woman volunteer and mother of two participants who cooked our meals and rarely spoke, cried tears of joy when receiving her award. Observing her physical release signified the critical importance of belonging in a community and being recognized as a valuable contributor (field notes, Chévere).

A [few] years ago when VIDA got in this area, we asked for a phone line. There were none in this zone, so we asked for a phone line for us. The telephone line arrived, which sounds silly, but it transcended the community. Many may not remember, but others tell us: *VIDA was that reason the phones arrived to our sector* and that is infrastructure. (Staff member, Lorena, Chévere)

It is important to note that there is little physical separation between the organization and the public. Near most playing field locations (but not all) VIDA has an office, but that term should be interpreted loosely and envisioned as two basic rooms. Here, employees base themselves, equipment is stored, and children receive homework assistance. Although there are security locks and alarms, the door is commonly ajar and children and adults flow in and out during operating hours. Upon entering, people are greeted warmly and asked how they can be helped. However, most social interactions between VIDA and the community take place in public space where VIDA employees do not have control.

All VIDA sport activities take place on public playing fields. On many occasions, non-VIDA community members recreated in the same space and often illicit substances were consumed nearby (Field notes, Bacano and Chévere). A typical session at Bacano included blaring Champeta music, galloping horses, and people crossing the field at their leisure. While I was conducting research, a coach had his phone stolen at gunpoint; and another shared he had witnessed open gun fire on a field a few years prior (Field notes, Bacano, August). At a newer location in Chévere, where the organization has yet to

establish relationships with the community, teens sat in a circle huffing glue and young men sat on the sidelines closely studying the girls playing (Field notes, Chévere, May).

Despite the challenges and realities of neighborhood politics, VIDA continues to operate in and shape these spaces. Interlocutors, such as staff member Lorena, addressed that public playing space has changed since VIDA arrived:

Those fields, as they were before, were dangerous. Then it became a place where anyone could go to play. On weekends people came to play. The area, let's say, was marked by the protection of VIDA. People stopped going to those fields to use drugs because the VIDA children were there...During our trainings, the boys did not smoke there, but then at night there was consumption...It's another world [at night] but in the day, they respected that the children played there and that for us is significant. (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

A critical aspect of VIDA's operations is their vulnerability to local politics. Like local residents, VIDA staff must regularly adapt to change and resign control. Through these experiences as "insiders," they become relatable and empathetic to the community. Spaaij and Schlenker (2014) argue the "greatest possibilities for social change and conflict transformation" is a place embedded with risk and tension, where conflict is then managed (p. 644). In many ways, VIDA is exemplary for accomplishing this task. However, as explained below, this vulnerable positioning, when it is off balance, has severe repercussions.

The complexities of safe space relations and gendered space

Through the previous examples and quotations, there is a great deal of evidence about how VIDA endeavors to cultivate safe space relations by fostering relationships and investing in local infrastructure. The reality of VIDA's social positioning, however, is in a state of continuous troubleshooting. The crises VIDA staff manages on a daily basis includes supporting participants through misfortune, heeding donors' requests⁶³ and accessing communal playing spaces.

VIDA operates in public spaces within distressed communities where recreational space is limited and urban planning virtually non-existent. Unequal land distribution and complex land ownership processes intentionally consolidate and retain power among the Colombian elite; land ownership, access to space and ways of being in space is directly connected to colonialism and to Colombia's history of reoccurring violence (Patel-Campillo, 2015).⁶⁴ Next the relationship between the coloniality of gender and gendered space will be explored through the social positioning of female participants and the gendered social norms that hinder girls from participating in recreational activities offered in public spaces.

⁶³ VIDA's current existence and much of its success can be attributed to two distinct and conflicting actions, respectively: the central office employees' access to external funding received by marketing to corporate donors (CSR); and the field employees' (e.g., coaches and social workers) proactive cultivation of safe space relations through the implicit implementation of critical pedagogy (Oxford and Spaaij, 2017).

⁶⁴ Radical agrarian reform inspired by Marxism was the FARC's original motivation to take up arms in the mid-1960s. Land restitution continued to be a key discussion point in the recent peace negotiations. The UNDP reports that 52 percent of Colombia's farmland is owned by 1.15 percent of landowners and indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities are the most critically affected. In those communities, women own far less land than men.

The new field

VIDA reports that in 2014 the Chévere office registered 450 participants of which 40 percent identified as girls or young women.⁶⁵ During this same year, they received a notice from the government that in three months the public field would be commandeered for an infrastructural transportation project. Despite VIDA's deep connections and support from stakeholders and actors in the community, their lack of agency in this decision threatened their continuation. Staff member, Julio, spoke in frustration about the impact of this change:

Before we trained on a field where for [more than 10] years VIDA made necessary adjustments to make it work. There was a mountain in front and sewage drained onto the field, so we flattened the earth to open ditches around the field... Over time VIDA did an excellent job in that space, so much that we gained recognition in the community because we recovered that space. That space was recovered for the community, not only for VIDA. But in 2015, the state intervened with a special government project... So we had to close the operation at that point and look for other places to continue. This year, the children with VIDA continue to have a positive reputation, but it's complex. We are starting the program from zero in other places [different zones in the neighborhood]. Today

⁶⁵ I do not use VIDA's statistics without hesitation as on most days participant numbers were creatively recorded. I regularly signed in as a participant. It was common to hear staff members complain about the head office and donors' requests for quantitative data that demonstrated an increase in participant numbers, which the central office/donors considered a marker of success. Simultaneously, many staff members worked on short-term contracts which took their focus away from participants and threatened to reduce the number of staff available to participants.

we can say that we have approximately 100 children of 450 that we had last year.

We only have 100. (Staff member, Chévere, Julio)

The original field, described by Julio, is located at the base of three adjacent hills. Steep stairs and roads lead to houses stacked along the hills. This geographic layout permitted parents (mostly mothers) to observe their children from many vantage points. In turn, parents could watch their children play and be sure of their security. The new field did not provide this luxury, only when parents left their homes and walked uphill could they watch from the sidelines.⁶⁶ The new field is owned by the Catholic Church, which has granted VIDA temporary permission to use it.

Once VIDA moved their fields, they retained only one-quarter of their participants. The number of female participants was reduced from 180 to 20, so on average only 11 percent of participants were girls or young women at the new field,

⁶⁶ To get to the new field, I exit the office by closing the metal door until it clicks locked. In front of me is a half-paved road and three large spaces that were once fields. I cross it. On this day, the old goal posts are surrounded by a few cows. Big trenches have been dug through the center of what was once a playing field and it's a muddy mess with piles of upturned, green islands of grass. A muddy walking track divides the space. Flanked by kids and Yuliza, we walk together over the ply boards resting over the mud, jumping a few puddles here and there as we make our way to a perpendicular path. We stop and discuss our route to the new field. Recognizing our strength in numbers, one of the girls suggests the middle road because it passes by her house; an older girl disagrees arguing it is not the best route because there is a dangerous dog on the corner. Together we navigate the first hill on a steep dirt road that separates houses and is lined with dogs on chains, some passive, some eager to approach. Creativity blends with design on these streets as old car tires transformed into planter boxes. Painted with bright colors and positioned outside front door stoops, they signify home and stability in an impermanent place. The road is almost impassable at sections where rocks are piled high or parked cars block our path. We intersect with a larger road, cars pass us and we pass a bakery on our right. The smell of bread wafts into our noses but mixes with exhaust, as we begin our steady ascent up the final and long hill. Along the way a few boys pop out from a side street and join us. The final hike is extremely steep; we all complain about it in solidarity but continue walking until our hearts race from the altitude. Together, we turn left into a fenced field that has one of the best views of the city and has crosses mounted on two sides. Suddenly, children appear from all sides of the fence, some crawling over and under it, eager to have a run around and to gain the attention of the leaders and staff members. Young girls run up and hug me from behind, older participants give high fives or friendly shoulder nudges. Responding to routine, the staff and leaders begin to hatch a divide and conquer plan to organize the large number of children now running around aimlessly. (Field notes, Chévere, May)

(Field notes, Chévere, May). Although participant numbers drastically dropped for all children, the percentage of girls dropped by half. The situation quickly became gendered, a problem that appeared to be either unrecognized, trivialized, or ignored by staff and community members. Concerned, Julio spoke about this change, “We are really well structured and we were very strong, but with the series of changes, we are really falling short with the female population.” Another employee, Lorena, was less concerned and mirroring the international development industry, positioned girls’ inclusion as a subordinate problem:

It is not our goal. I cannot tell you *Oh, we're going to look for the method!* Now it is not on my mind to look for more girls. In my head, I need to stabilize the population there and for children to know how to reach us, boys and girls. The idea after awhile is to stabilize them at all points and then if I reflect and ask why are children not coming? But I have no focus on gender. (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

Community members voiced confusion asking why girls’ and young women’s participation reduced as a repercussion of the change, but female participants took the change in stride as “normal.”

The normality of exclusion

Most interlocutors avoided the obvious conversation that underpinned the situation regarding local power dynamics, a topic I indirectly and tentatively probed. During a

post-interview discussion when the tape recorder was off, Marco, a young man who previously participated with VIDA, referred to the topic of gendered space and asked me, “what do you know about the paramilitaries?” He proceeded to explain his lack of agency, the ever-shifting neighborhood boundaries, and his opinion that the new field is in a dangerous territory (Field notes, Chévere, May). Unlike most interlocutors, previous participant, Lourdes cut straight to the point regarding local violence and gendered space:

Well, because the football field is really far. The girls are more in danger because there are people, for example, the guerrilla, do you understand me? Sometimes they take the children, normally the children who are nine years old and they enlist them as soldiers. But with the girls it's worse because they cannot defend themselves, so they abuse them. For this reason, the mothers are more careful with the girls than with the boys, because they are weaker. And the boys, for example, if there is a problem they can run away as opposed to the girls who get scared and stay there. So, because the mothers are scared that something bad is going to happen to their girls, they prefer to not allow that they go to the football field, because it is really far from their home. (Previous participant, Chévere, Lourdes)

An international volunteer who had worked with VIDA for months observed that girls who continued to play at the new field were accompanied by their brothers and often a dog (Field notes, Chévere, May). Lourdes confirmed this, “Yes, if they come it is with

their brothers, or they come with other boys, but never alone.” As discussions continued, the concept of gendered space and how it delimits girls became clearer:

I think, I do not know, that it is because of the transfer. It is easier for a boy to leave his house. A girl is told, *Do not go out alone, they will kidnap you, they will rape you, it's bad!* I think because of that, we would have to look, because many children did not really come back... I guess for a lot of them [female participants] it is because the field is further away and they are not allowed to walk alone.
(Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

In conjunction to gendered space, a local social worker connected the decrease in girls' and young women's participation to gendered roles, gendered expectations and ultimately that girls are in more danger of experiencing violence (Field notes, Chévere, May). However, many community members refuted this, arguing that all people are equal, free to do as they choose, and that ultimately girls do not enjoy playing as much as boys (Field notes, Chévere, May).

The majority of female participants interviewed discredited gender stereotypes that produced the idea that girls do not like sports as much as boys. But when asked why there are fewer girls, Chévere participant, Cesi, then justified the numbers through a gender-based stereotype: “there are not many girls that like to play football, while the majority of men like to play football. Because they feel more interested in it. Instead, women are more interested in studying English and things like that.” Cristina, who is a Colombian student social worker volunteering at VIDA in Bacano believed girls'

participation is “phenomenal” but noted she does not play sports because she is not interested, but she could not pinpoint why. From her perspective, there are many girls who want to play, but do not because of stigma: “it has a big influence because there are always stigmas. For example, if you play football they ask you *why do you want to play a man’s sport?* They see this sport as just for men and not for women.” Daniela, a female participant in Bacano concurred:

Yes, maybe there is lots of exclusion. The things that a woman does, maybe a man can’t do and maybe this is what happened with football. Maybe they don’t accept women playing football as much as men playing football, maybe because if you play football you are a man, you are a “machorra” so you feel like the men can do more and women can do less.⁶⁷ (Participant, Bacano, Daniela)

Yuliza, a participant in Chévere, argued that things have changed in the last decade, but it is parents who do not want their daughters to play. When I asked Yuliza how her life differs from girls who do not play, she highlighted girls who participate at VIDA have the freedom to move and enter more spaces. Referencing girls who do not play, she said, “they do not leave the house. As soon as they finish school every day, they stay in their houses. Their fathers don’t allow them to leave the house.” She continued, “when I was playing with my neighbors [before she entered VIDA] and the other girls saw me playing, they wanted to play, but their mothers didn’t let them.”

⁶⁷ Machorra is a derogatory slang term that means lesbian/dyke.

Space considerations

Through discussion and observation, it became clear that for girls to participate with VIDA, physical and psychological security were critical. The psychological aspect was more apparent in Bacano, where standards of feminine performativity are more restrictive. Although participants and local athletes accessed communal space in Bacano, many girls and women did so in hesitation: “I see them [girls] as players, but for people from other communities it is different because it is thought that playing sport is for men... and when that happens, it skews or limits the space for men. Women think they [women] should not participate” (Social worker, Bacano, Martha Cecilia). Here, female participation looms at 10 percent, and access to space is less about physical occupation than psychological regulation. Girls and young women’s socialization includes active participation in the process of interior colonization that harks back to the colonality of gender.

Although the numbers of female participants in Chévere were reduced with a field change and the numbers in Bacano continue to be dismally low, girls and young women’s participation in Chévere over the last decade has revealed a micro shift in culture within the local community. Through everyday negotiation and interaction, female participants are challenging the normative rituals that have rendered girls and women invisible and excluded in public spaces. This was supported by Lourdes who argued that despite lower numbers in Chévere at the moment, there has been a shift in community members’ collective mentality:

The way that they have treated us changed when we started to play the championships. Before, the men just saw us as women, which meant we were not really good at sports. Nowadays, there are some husbands who go to watch their wives play football. They support the women, for example, they have brought water to the matches. We are now more recognized. Now we are seen in a better light because lots of women have been successful at sports and have been winners...They have a different perception of us. (Previous participant, Chévere, Lourdes)

Despite the new field location, the presence of VIDA that spans more than 10 years in Chévere has initiated a process of normalizing female football players within specific parts of the neighborhood. Julio explained that this shift has not occurred throughout the larger city among wealthier populations:

Here in Chévere there are several women's sporting events and women's championships, especially futsal. And the community recognizes it as positive. Girls aren't playing futsal in all locations [in Chévere] and not in the city. You go to the north of the city and you do not find girls playing. If you find them, it is a group of 10 people, no more. In [Chévere], every weekend you find many parks where there are women's football games. That is important and here the community recognizes female sport. I think girls who like to play, compete, but they also study, work, and perform the formal activities for the benefit of their

family. They are not girls who are up and down [the street]. (Staff member, Chévere, Julio).

Julio's comment demonstrates that for many people in select areas of Chévere, the idea of who Mary is and what she is permitted to do has shifted. Lourdes' mom, Daniela Maria, substantiated Julio's comment, noting that she now regularly sees girls and boys playing together in the local park. From their perspective, in Chévere, Mary is now able to do things previously aligned with Eve, such as accessing public space and playing football.

Although Mary has experienced a shift into a more complex being, at VIDA, she remains limited. This does not eliminate the existence of Eve who continues to be “up and down the street,” a phrase that signifies a promiscuous, rebellious girl or woman outside of her home.⁶⁸ The phrase eliminates the complex reality that Eve may simply be enjoying an alternative lifestyle or more critically, seeking opportunities for herself and/or for her family's survival. It also ignores the gendered fact that boys can be on the street without question.

The path to the door

VIDA's work demonstrates that creating safe space relations is a dynamic process requiring a commitment to cultivating relationships, which for VIDA includes maintaining a loving internal culture, providing psycho-social support and new opportunities for participants, proactively improving local infrastructure, and adapting and working through unforeseen challenges. However, what became clear when

⁶⁸ To be candid, I heard the phrase “en la calle” a lot in interviews. In reflection, I unconsciously adapted it to my vocabulary and used it in discussions in the latter half of my field research.

analyzing safe space relations is, despite efforts to rebuild trust, the organization and its constituents are in vulnerable positions that rely on public space.

The use of public space, and in particular, how boys and men are socialized to dominate sporting spaces has become an implicit and explicit ritualized form of social control in Chévere and Bacano. This physically preserves space for boys and men, and psychologically restricts girls and women from participating. Although “the door is always open” for female participants, the door is not the problem, but rather, the literal and metaphorical path to the door. It’s a path littered with a colonial residue.

Psychological space is as challenging to reconcile as physical space. Staff, participants and community members regularly touted “everyone is equal!” thereby casually ignoring the psycho-social barriers that shape and constrain the reality of “equality.” Proverbially treating all participants as “equal” – in other words, institutionally applying a word to the extent that it loses meaning – minimized female participants’ gender-based restrictions and reinstituted the continuation of gendered space. Ultimately, by exploring safe space relations in this context, we discover the intimate relationship between the notions of safe space and gendered space, and how space and access to space is shaped and constrained by macro social forces and specifically, by normalized acts of violence.

This chapter intentionally introduces the reader to the complex social contexts of Chévere and Bacano through the concepts of safe and gendered space by answering the question, where are the girls? In the next chapter the lives of the young women who regularly participate with VIDA will be explored in order to answer who can play and why can they play?

Chapter 8

CAN SHE PLAY?

Women's participation in sport

For years, sociologists have explained sport as a social construction that reflects and shapes society, especially when probing the topics of social inclusion, access, equity, and power.⁶⁹ With globalization and momentum for uniform modernity, understanding sport as a social construction becomes more complex. Levermore and Beacom (2009) sum up the discussion of sport in the global context in two arguments: one, sport continues “to replicate the characteristics of the societies from which they are situated”; or two, sport is “succumb to more homogenized traits because of the processes of colonialization, post-colonialism and globalization” (p. 5). With these two perspectives in mind, Levermore and Beacom (2009) question if sport can be the agent of change, or if sport reflects wider social and cultural change, and furthermore, how this conceptualization influences researchers’ understandings of SDP’s social impact. This chapter will explore the gendered nature of sport in Colombia by critically examining how cultural experiences of physicality are gendered, but are potentially changing, and how this may shape power relations within this specific research. Drawing attention to the complex interplay between agency and structure, this chapter answers the questions, who can play and why can they play?

The site of sport, like home life and work life in Colombia, is gendered. Gutmann and Viveros (2005) highlight that the economic crisis in the 1980s allowed for a shift in

⁶⁹ For positive and negative examples, see: Anderson, 2008; Bandy et al., 2012; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Messner, 2007; Hartman-Tews and Pfister, 2003.

gender relations, as many families needed two incomes to survive. This shift led to spaces formerly predominantly reserved for men (e.g., cafes and sporting facilities) suddenly having an increased presence of women. Explaining the relationship between power and masculinity, Gutmann and Viveros (2005) argue even with this shift in space the ingrained supremacy of masculinity continues to reign through the reproduction of relations grounded in hegemonic masculinity:

Despite the fact that there are multiple concepts of masculinity, and despite the recent increase in encounters between men and women in time and space, however, there has often, in Latin America, been a tendency to reproduce relations grounded in hegemonic masculinity; that is to ignore or subordinate women. (p. 118)

Whereas men's participation in sport demonstrates idealized masculinity, young women's participation contradicts the idealized "delicate" and "feminine" role to be performed by girls and women.⁷⁰ Addressing women's football in the city of Medellín, Colombian authors Cardona Alvarez, Arango, and Garcia (2012) write:

Sports practices, from the beginning, were only permitted for men. Through sport men could develop characteristics such as aggression, competitiveness, and facing danger without flinching. Contrastingly, in societies governed by patriarchal culture, women were prohibited from playing. Women's roles were relegated to the home, to procreation and to care for children. Historically women were to

⁷⁰ The word "delicate" will be used regularly in this thesis because it was repeatedly used by interlocutors when describing girls and women.

express themselves by being delicate, performing as a doll and therefore incapable of participating in rough activities such as football. For example, football is said to be a sport of shock (physical contact) and strength, and therefore women do not have the physical characteristics to compete. This conditioning has given men superiority over women in the development of their physical abilities... It seems that sport and play have been gendered: balls for boys and dolls for girls. This has differentiated the development of physical skills of women compared to men. Each is conditioned and consequently benefits have been provided to the latter. As a result women who practice certain sports, including football, experience rejection, censorship, marking and discrimination because they are not performing the stereotype of femininity that is privileged in this society. (personal translation, n.p.)

A confusing paradox arises and challenges the gender binary when girls and young women play sports like football because their participation in sport places them in a male classification as they are performing masculinity by using their body in so called indelicate ways.

Knowing that playing sports remains taboo for approximately half of all Colombians, a critical question is who can play? Followed by why can they play? The young women participating at VIDA are the first women in their community to participate in organized sport. They are a minority of young women expanding the definition of socially acceptable activities for girls and women. The low numbers of female participants reflect the difficulty of performing a role outside of the social norm –

one that is complex and contradictory. In Chévere only 20 percent of observed participants were female and in Bacano 10 percent. Although these numbers fluctuate by field location and local politics, the reality is that girls' participation in sport is generally discouraged and these young women experience negative labeling and social stigma on a regular basis. Becoming the example is arduous, and the first step in this act is the personal decision to go to the field to play.

Three themes emerged when answering the questions who can play and why can they play. These include escaping violence experienced at home, because traditional binary gender roles were not practiced at home, and because the young women's parents believed the potential opportunities through being involved with VIDA trumped social denigration. To give the reader insight into the complex social and affective relations that have shaped and continue to shape female participants' lives, young women's stories will be explored through narratives using their words and describing their actions, in conjunction with the words and experiences of those who surround them.

Escaping violence

Lourdes

It was early morning in Chévere. On the left a bakery's doors were open to morning customers and on the right, where the two streets intersected, a strikingly large group of stray dogs rummaged through garbage. The streets were filled with children in their uniforms hurrying to school and adults attending to errands. As I walked up the paved hill speckled with potholes and mud, I faintly heard my name. The sounds were slurred and the words that accompanied them were undecipherable. As I walked closer, I realized the

words came from Lourdes. But today Lourdes was foreign in her own body. Her expressions and her movements were not hers. Today she was a stranger. She stood there alone, leaning against a pole, slurring my name timidly.

Many days passed before I saw her again. I was surprised and comforted to see her waiting for me on the steps in front of VIDA. She wore her usual running shoes, three-quarters length football pants and a sweatshirt, signifiers that identified her to the community as a footballer. Her long brown thick hair was slicked back and wrapped into a tight bun at the nape of her neck. As we walked, she explained her battle with basuco, a cheap bi-product of cocaine that is more potent than crack due to its unrefined, unpurified mixture that may include brick dust, chalk, and even lead, sulfuric acid and kerosene or gasoline. Since the 1980s it has wreaked havoc across class lines in Colombia. "I'm ten days free now," she asserted, "and I want to play in a football tournament in Cali."

Lourdes spoke of the past and present as if she had nothing to lose. Her small frame, mischievous grin, and brown eyes held a lot of pain, but she was not afraid to talk about her pain or her experiences with violence. After hearing her speak of witnessing her friend's death in a mix-up that took place when she was outside her house after the customary 9 p.m. curfew, she expressed, "I'm not afraid, because I have practically lived in the street." Like many participants in Chévere, she embodied characteristics that exuded a unique combination of immaturity and strength.

Together we walked up dozens of concrete steps to enter her childhood home, a disheveled space with three concrete walls, electricity, and running water. In the place where a fourth wall would be was a footpath that cut into a steep hill. We sat on a waist-high concrete barrier with our backs to the football field located 60 or more meters

below. The view overlooking the field and a main street in Chévere was stunning. Daniela Maria, her mother, had recently kicked Lourdes out of this house for not paying rent in addition to her on-and-off again anti-social behavior. She greeted me without any Pomp and Circumstance.

Our communication was not free flowing. I got the impression that she is rarely asked how she is feeling or her opinion on subjects beyond laundry. Her responses were short and literal; her Spanish direct yet laden with slang. Mid-response Lourdes frequently interjected from inside yelling “No Mami,” adding details to her mother’s responses. I yelled back asking her to stop listening, but also asking for help in deciphering local vernacular. Lourdes and I laughed at each other throughout the process.

Although kind hearted, Daniela Maria seemed too exhausted for laughter. Twenty-five years ago, when she arrived, all the houses were tents made of “black cloth” and she had to walk long distances to get water; “there was nothing, no pastures, no houses, no nothing.” She has never played football and when asked why not, she noted recent changes, “Because there was no atmosphere, at that time there was not the atmosphere there is now. For example, all the children, from little ones, are going to play and saying – *I'm going to play football!* – In that time, there was not that.” She also noted girls who played football were called “marimacha” or “gaminas,” but she claimed she does not hear the derogatory terms meaning tomboy or street urchin like she did ten years ago.

Daniela Maria’s brown skin has been worn by the harsh elements of living at high altitude. She washes clothes for a living and is semi-literate. When asked about the expectations of a woman in Chévere, she responded “to maintain your husband.” Lourdes

cackled. Her mother's response mirrored not only her answer, but her life. Daniela Maria continued, "women get pregnant and the husbands don't help. It's been a hard life for me."

She appreciated how VIDA has supported her daughter for more than a decade and noted that children in the program benefit because "their time is occupied, they learn to not hit and the boys learn to respect girls because they play together." Although she appreciated and saw value in VIDA for reasons concerning her daughter and the community, Daniela Maria could not connect VIDA to social change. When asked if she believed Lourdes' life is different from hers, she replied: "She's always been the same with me. She's been with me all her life and she has not changed." The intent of the question was not to be about Lourdes literally, but the structures that Daniela Maria had felt impended on their lives. When asked if machismo has changed, she emphatically responded, "No."

Lourdes and her mother are both single mothers who support their families through gendered manual labor. Until her recent stint with basuco, three days a week, Lourdes cleaned a private home located in a wealthy neighborhood 90 minutes by bus north of Chévere. Lourdes explained that her parents were not a direct barrier for her participation, in the typical way. In her opinion, many girls cannot play because of their fathers' religious leanings: "there are the religious Christians, evangelicals, who say their law does not allow girls to play, no playing football, that the girls are to be in the house, they need to learn to cook to maintain their husband and children." The connection between religion, predominantly Catholicism, and Catholic-shaped binary gender roles subtly entered interviews throughout this project; and through the lives of Lourdes and

Daniela Maria the coloniality of gender is explicit. However, organized religion did not impede Lourdes from participating. Lourdes began playing as an escape from her abusive father:

My dad always came back drunk and if I saw him on the street he would hit me.

Every time I saw him I used to go and run because he hit me. My mom was never there because she worked and everything...My parents were never with me so I made my decisions...

After a few years of playing in the street with boys while actively avoiding her home life, she found VIDA. VIDA became her refuge: "this is my family and she is my mom," she said when referring to the organization and VIDA's psychologist. Although Lourdes recognizes the limitations ascribed by local social pressures such as guerrillas and paramilitaries, but also structural institutions such as the Catholic Church, she continues to believe everyone has agency in their decisions: "Girls who play are not more free, girls can choose what they want and in an equal manner, I can choose what I want, I look for what will benefit me, and everyone can look for what will benefit them."

The notion of individual agency within a social setting that has countless restrictions on its locals (e.g., guerrilla tax, curfew) is confusing. Yet, as we see in Daniela's story below, contradictions such as double standards and social stigmas are considered normal by these young women. In conversation, participants like Lourdes and Daniela justified the tension between idealized agency and their restricted daily experiences by concentrating on values such as self-control and personal responsibility.

Daniela

The sun set as Daniela walked towards me outside a busy shopping center in Bacano. She wore a pink and black football uniform, but had removed the small stud earrings she normally wore. Her wavy thick brown hair was brushed back, flat against her head. The golden child of VIDA's Bacano program, Daniela exuded stability and order; she was clean, calm, and organized. Even though her demeanor displayed control, she also exuded kindness, which was regularly exposed through her shy grin and soft words.

Together we crossed a highway and walked through a middle-class neighborhood to find a green grass field lit by large lights and encompassed by a fence. It was Wednesday evening and she wanted me to see her team practice, to show me that girls were playing in other neighborhoods. During the walk to the field, she explained she was new to this team. She had been given a scholarship and was one of the older players. Her team practiced twice a week and played matches on weekends. Thirty plus teenagers lined up and participated in two separate drills; Daniela was focused, putting all her energy into the exercises. As girls sprinted and balls flew over the goal post, I settled into comfortable discussion with a father standing on the sideline. He noted that few girls in the low-socioeconomic areas play football because there is a strong stigma against girls' participation in a contact sport, but volleyball, kickball and softball are becoming socially acceptable sports for women.

The following day in Bacano, Daniela led the afternoon football practices with organized precision and execution. She never hesitated to blow her whistle or give commands. When the methodological training for leaders took place, she outshined the coaches with her creativity, cool control, and presentation skills. Like Lourdes, Daniela

spoke often about personal responsibility in decision-making and personal choices. She noted that she had chosen to change and that VIDA influenced her path:

I came from Venezuela. I arrived here during a very hard stage. There was a lot of violence. I paid no attention to my mother and made her stress a lot. I did not go to school. I did nothing. Then I started thinking. I saw the foundation. I don't know if it was God. I went in and asked what I had to bring, what I needed to do to be here. The teacher said to me – relax, here, return with these papers. I came and started training and that was how I started. Perhaps I joined at a time that was not so easy in my life. I was looking for something, I fought everything, I was a very rude girl and here I learned to handle that.

Although Lourdes and Daniela lived in extremely different social and geographical climates, both young women came to VIDA to escape home life in search of pleasure and stability. For them, playing and finding communal support outside their immediate family overrode and continues to negate the social denigration they experience. Through their words and actions, they brought the concepts of control and stability to the forefront and both women regularly addressed the concept of agency. Only when discussing personal and sometimes painful experiences did they bypass the argument, that values remedy social inequalities built by the colonial system, such as racism, sexism and classism to address the double standards and social stigmas frequently accepted as normal.

Swapping gender roles

Yuliza

Yuliza said women are beginning to work outside the home “because women were bored in the house and because there was no money for food.” She considers girls’ and boys’ social roles as equal because her father is at home and her mother works outside the home. The change of social norms in Yuliza’s house happens due to necessity, not by choice. Yuliza is one of twelve children. Like Lourdes and Daniela, she dressed in football pants and sweatshirts, but unlike them, she always had a beanie covering her long brown hair that draped her shoulders and back. Every day she came to VIDA, mostly to linger, but after soft suggestion, she would help with tasks or lead practices. When discussing this research with local community members, a common question was, had I seen Yuliza play?

The VIDA staff questioned her safety at home; she never spoke directly about violence, but she often had red eyes holding back tears and appeared distressed. We walked around Chévere together regularly, but Yuliza maintained a wall around herself, regarding her personal life. She was excellent at dodging probing questions with jokes or avoidance. Nevertheless, she frequently sent me texts about Jesus and encouraged me to interview her priest, but the arrangements always fell through.

Yuliza began playing football in the street with her neighbor. It was not until a VIDA representative went to her Church and her father, Fabian, heard them speak about values that she joined VIDA. Fabian is now in his 60s. Freshly bathed and dressed in a plaid buttoned shirt and khaki pants, he gave me a big smile and warm welcome as I entered his home. It smelled of fresh soap and cologne. Inside, bricks revealed exposed

wires, foam mattresses without sheets leaned against walls, and concrete bags were stacked high. He asked me to sit down on a couch that separated the entrance from the kitchen before pouring me orange soda, an expensive treat. Yuliza had been talking about the customary curfew, saying sometimes she goes out at night because the view of the lights over the city is beautiful and she wished I could see it, “between 7 and 7:30. After that it’s too dangerous.” I asked her what she hears at night, “Dogs, people fighting, gun shots. Nothing good.”

Fabian explained that five years ago he was diagnosed with a heart condition that affects his spine and his mobility. As a result, he became the “housekeeper, looking after the kids, and taking care of activities.” In her interview, Yuliza talked about the normalcy of being a part of a family where her mom works and her dad is at home. She has fun with her dad in the kitchen and laughed while explaining that she finds their joint messiness amusing. When I asked if this gender arrangement had become normative in Chévere, he responded like a loving grandpa who realized that patriarchy exists only because he had lost his position of power as an able-bodied man. “It is not in my case, as I say, because of my illness I have had to take a nearly 180 degree turn for work, I am mostly disabled.” He spoke of gendered roles and gendered labor unlike others in the neighborhood. To him, gendered social divisions seemed nonsensical and my questions were outdated. However, Fabian admitted before he fell sick he did not believe that boys should play with girls’ toys or games. Now Fabian feels it is important that jobs are not categorized by gender:

I am accustomed to doing the work of women too. My sons are accustomed to

doing women's work, because it is important for them too. I have taught my kids to wash dishes; to make food... it does not matter if it's a boy or a girl using the shovel. Let's dig a hole! It's the same, for me it's the same.

For Fabian, his view on gender roles in public space have also changed, which he noted when speaking about being inspired by his daughter's passion and skill for football:

Well to me it is good, excellent. Because I feel admiration for her, because previously women were discriminated against a lot, on the issue of contact sport, contact work. Now women have taken a very important step [by playing] sport.

Although his reasons for transforming his thinking seemed clear to me, it was not to him. He fumbled and paused trying to answer why he changed his way of thinking, noting that society had changed too and now boys and girls have more social interaction. This is a common response, which in other cases included a discussion about access to the Internet. What he likes most is that Yuliza has positive male role models at VIDA. He hopes this will positively influence her expectations of men.

His newfound personal convictions regarding Yuliza's participation and how gender roles are negotiated are limited, however. Mid-way through the interview I asked if everyone in his community knows of VIDA. In his response, his personal beliefs uncomfortably contrasted with communal social relations, as he clarified that he does not tell people that Yuliza participates because he feels not everyone will understand:

Yes, they know them. I say that yes, they know them. What happens is that some people have a bad impression of VIDA and maybe they are enemies of VIDA, and these people don't want good things for VIDA, for the organization to grow, because it doesn't meet their interests! They do not understand the damage they do to the community, because as I say, my child when she goes there in her free time, she is learning! But, they do not understand it like that.

Diving deeper into conversation, he explained that society “always sees women as a weak sex.” When asked if there are people who disagree with his opinions, Fabian replied:

Well, I think that for the minute at least, there are parents who do not agree with their children going out [of the house] [pause] because the first thing they say is that the [girls playing] are machorras, which they are, Yes! They have more style of man than of [pause] and then I think they suddenly accept it, but they do not share or support it.

Discussing negative comments people say to him because of Yuliza's participation, he said, “Her mother sometimes believes in her, but sometimes she doesn't, but in my case I and her sister, we support her a lot. We say to her that [social pressure] is not important.” As he continued to demonstrate his exalted support for Yuliza, his voice grew louder. He spoke of internal strife, noting that he disregards her mother's negative sentiments before comparing her joy for playing, like someone “lost in time.” After saying an endearing nickname referring to her, he proclaimed “if you do this, HAGALO!” This translates to

go for it! Through grand hand gestures he reassured me that she will play with his support and without having extra difficulty from the family.

Although laden with heteronormative responses, hearing Fabio's endorsement and pride in his daughter produced a rare intimate and sweet moment in this research. It also revealed a micro-transformation in thinking that was a product of primary and secondary experiences. When speaking of "enemies" he verbally recognized that Yuliza's participation is not isolated from the communal gaze and that power is held within multiple parties, including some who do not gain from VIDA's activities.

Opportunity trumps stigma

Valery's girls

The heat was stifling and the noises were overwhelming – kids chatted, a motorcycle flared its engine repeatedly, and the coach attempted to yell over it all. A VIDA leader was watching me from an adjacent field, across a road and 100 meters away. The VIDA coach warned me about leaving the field without them because on the day before in broad daylight, he had been held at gunpoint on another football field. The robber stole his cell phone. He was shaken and he directed his fear from this experience into his feelings of responsibility regarding my safety.

Alejandra and I were sitting on the front stoop of a house directly facing the field, extremely distracted by the surrounding amusements, passing the recorder back and forth as we talked. Alejandra spoke about her grandmother's lack of opportunities: "No, she didn't study, she couldn't do anything, and this is an opportunity for me...girls' football has even changed in my lifetime. There were times when I couldn't play [because of

health] and I felt bad. I missed it.” Mid-way through the interview, she was asked a few gender-specific questions, such as “what are the expectations of women here?” When she said she did not understand the question, her intonation sounded more Mexican than Colombian. I verbally stumbled through a few examples as the motorcycle engine roared too closely. Moments later, she responded that the majority of parents in Bacano do not allow their daughters to play football because they think it is for men.

Unlike many female players interviewed, there was no sign of a suppressed activist hiding within Alejandra. The coach yelled and again, it was difficult to hear clearly. “Playing gives me opportunities to travel locally, it occupies my attention,” she said. On the day of the interview, she was playing for the neighborhood team that competes on the weekend and shares the field with VIDA. Tomorrow she would practice with VIDA. The team’s Facebook page is managed by their coach. He alternates social media posts with images of the girls playing in tournaments and barely clad women on motorcycles. Before his interview, two young teenagers sat on his lap, hugging him. I requested that they leave, so I could conduct the interview. The scene resembled a well-fed king rudely waving his hand to gesture to his concubines to leave his space. The girls giggled and left.

Few girls regularly played football at VIDA in Bacano, so few that I considered moving locations. Valery’s daughters, however, were always there among the boys. Their short stature and chestnut hair that matched their chestnut colored skin, reflected indigenous heritage. When Valery smiled, her silver capped front tooth caught the light. She exuded kindness, hope, and solidarity. Each interview began with a question about

routine. What was a typical day in the interlocutor's life? Vague and generic responses were common. But Valery did not conceal her reality.

Valery was restricted to her house and her husband financially supports the family, "I do not work, my husband works. He is selling coffee [downtown] at night, risking his life to sell. So sometimes he says it's boring. But if he does not work one day, we do not eat." Valery labeled her neighborhood "dangerous" and spoke of regular crime that results in her family spending most of their time indoors. She noted:

Sometimes there are days that I get bored of the confinement, I cannot go out because of attacks (being robbed), and I have to keep my children safe because of this. The fun for them is here [VIDA], sometimes they are in school and they say that there is a robbery or a fight and they run home.

To maintain their security, she walks her children to and from school and to attend Church twice a week.

Valery learned about VIDA at Church and went to the VIDA office to learn more. The idea to register their children was not welcomed by her husband:

Their father told me that if the girl played she could break a foot, and it would be my fault. He was furious with me, but I did not pay attention, I came and I registered them. Thank God they are happy.

Later in the interview she returned to the tension in their household and how it has transformed:

Well before my husband did not want them to play, but he does not tell them anything now. They are going to play. Then he says they are spending money on shoes and I tell him that they are given by VIDA, so that he does not say anything. They love playing. They would like to go [play] elsewhere, but my children could not go to the [next city] for not having money, but they love it.

Although Valery took a stand against her husband to register her children, she said before her daughters showed interest, she negatively judged girls and women who played sports:

There are girls that I see out there who do not know how to play. Before, I scolded them because they played ball in the street. I told them they look like males playing, that's for men. But I remembered that before [referencing childhood] I liked to play football and my parents never wanted me to play.

Valery is aware of the stigma denoted to girls who play, but because she spends her time at home, she says she is not confronted by it; Alejandra, on the other hand, says she “hears negative things on the street, it makes her feel bad, but it’s okay.” Stigmas and stereotypes do not threaten Valery’s decision, as her goal is to provide her children with more opportunities than she had, and she sees VIDA as a mechanism to do this.

Valery entered the workforce at age 14. She became pregnant at 18. “I hardly enjoyed life because my dad was very complicated. He did not let us go to a party or anything; I was kept there in the house.” She wants her three daughters and son to go to school, but the cost of “uniform, shoes, stockings, bag” among other things is taxing on the family:

I give them everything so that they take advantage of the study. We never had support like I give my daughters. That is why I tell them to study, do not to fall in love, fall when you have already studied. That's why they enter here at [VIDA] to distract their minds.

The concepts of agency and distraction were frequently addressed in interviews. And the young women who were continuing with the program into early adulthood identified that their participation helped them regulate and occupy their time. They regarded this as a positive outcome as they connected this occupancy with helping them maintain a life “out of trouble.” Trouble referred to illicit drug consumption and out of wedlock sexual relations. They played into the modern, neoliberal paradigm of having agency, when the reality is that the “invisible threads” that connect them to those in power have been delimiting their paths since before their births.

The three themes drawn from the data can be narrowed into two points that answer the questions, who are playing and why they can play. One, the first and second narratives revealed young women who valued their potential gain from participating with VIDA as more important than the risk of social stigma (and potential threat to their

family). Lourdes, Daniela and young women in similar scenarios can play because they feel they have nothing to lose. The final scenario is like the first, but it was the mother who initiated having her daughters play. Second, in Yuliza's case, her nuclear family had already experienced a monumental shift in gender roles within the home. Therefore, in her family, women's participation in leisure activities socially reserved for men is no longer taboo, and the fear of being different is not an explicit threat.

The coloniality of gender in action

Invisible threads that trace back to colonialism create multiple exclusions for people in this research. The majority of female participants although aware of structures and barriers that prevent girls from participating, were adamant that they have choice in their everyday decisions. While local powers explicitly shape and constrain their lives – namely, the Catholic Church, their parents and local gangs – they reveal the extension of religion, patriarchy and violence in these young women's everyday lives. Their false sense of agency exposes the entanglement of diverse oppressions that lie at the junction of the coloniality of gender. These young women have, to various degrees accepted a multitude of socially constructed restrictions as normal. For example, Lourdes, argues that she has agency and makes her own decisions despite the fact that her most promising option for employment (economic stability) is through unregulated gendered manual labor (or prostitution); and the reality that she needed the program to begin with, to escape her abusive father. Yuliza believes it was her choice to participate in VIDA, but as her father noted, if he had not become disabled (an experience which altered his thinking) she likely would not have been permitted to play. Her father explicitly notes that his wife

and community of friends do not accept Yuliza's rejection of heteronormative femininity. Valery ignored her husband's instruction disallowing their daughters to participate, but even with his newfound approval and her hope for more opportunities, her family's day-to-day existence continues to be constrained by their indigenous identity, low-socio economic class status, and violence. Every day, these "live, historical and fully described beings" are without choice, actively participating in (and to some degree resisting) the complex entanglement of economics, race and gender (sexuality) imposed by colonialism (Lugones, 2010, p. 747).

There is an evident tension between the way these young women want the world to be, and the reality of the way things are in the world, heard throughout their narratives. These young women do not appear to be buying into spectacular femininity in physical representation and they also challenge heteronormative gender expectations by playing football in public spaces. The common focus on values relating to individual change and becoming "self-reliant/individual", "good", "active citizens" reveals their subordinate place as controlled subjects within neoliberal modernity, which is potentially problematic. Giraldo (2016b) argues, "the colonality of gender operates as a by-product of a local history – the struggle for women's rights in the advanced-capitalist and neoliberal West, where liberal feminism is hegemonic – projected as global design" (p. 165). It is at this intersection that we begin to understand the subjective positioning of these young women within the global SDP industry, which promotes and enforces an agenda that commits to the hegemonic Western liberal feminist global design (Chawanksy & Schlenker, 2017; McDonald, 2015, 2017). This positioning reveals the double-bind of colonality as the female participants can afford to "either comply with

Western – modern, neoliberal, capitalist – understandings of being an emancipated woman, or play the role of perpetual victim in need of rescue” (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 165).

In what seemed to be automated and cursory responses, VIDA employees and participants proudly asserted that VIDA is positively transforming the community because of values.⁷¹ The spaces between these words are their personal goals, rather than values. Whether they were sold to them by an organization that provides them with food, a sense of purpose and security remains unclear and questionable. Underpinning these statements is a conceptual dichotomy between good and bad behaviour (e.g., Mary and Eve) and an assumption that following the “good” path will result in opportunity, if not a life-changing trajectory. One concern when analysing VIDA and the SDP industry is the assumption of the deficit paradigm - that children must first change themselves or be changed in order to assimilate into a specific non-threatening mould accepted by society, (or those in power) before they can then become change-makers.

By unpacking narratives bolstered by observations, we can better understand and contextualize local lived experiences and the nuances between the agency and structure debate. By exploring who is participating and why, we begin to discover the obstacles that hinder girls from participation and the structural barriers that delimit female participants. When probing deeper into life histories and comparing social constraints, similarities arose that revealed the complexities of living in the zone of non-being. Institutionalized racism underpinned by the rigid class system, violence, patriarchy and Catholicism, continues to maintain and shape heteronormative gender roles. These diverse oppressions, explored through the narratives above, shape and constrain the

⁷¹ All 22 interlocutors directly associated with VIDA said the word values a total of 73 times in their interviews.

opportunities and daily routines of citizens within Chévere and Bacano, and reveal the coloniality of gender in action.

In this chapter, the gendered nature of sport was explored through the lived experiences of participants and their family members. The findings revealed commonalities among the young women who participated, including: to escape violence experienced at home, because traditional binary gender roles were not practiced at home, and because the young women's parents believed the potential opportunities available through involvement with VIDA trumped social denigration. Specific buzz words that aligned with neoliberal modernity and Western liberal feminism that are frequently identified in the SDP discourse were also exposed. Only when discussing personal and sometimes painful experiences did these young women bypass the argument that values remedy social inequalities such as racism, sexism and classism to address the double standards and social stigmas frequently accepted as normal. When participants adopt specific values and embody qualities of the 'good, active citizen', we must ask, will they then be capable and equipped to change the oppressive and entangled structures (e.g. patriarchy, class system, structural racism, poor educational system) that caused a need for them to participate in the program to begin with?

Chapter 8 provided an introduction to how socialization, stigma and VIDA's community of practice shape how community members understand gender difference; it also introduced the reader to how participants and their families are engaging in the reproduction and resistance of gendered sport. Chapter 9 will dive deeper into the relationship between girls and young women's participation at VIDA and the social constructions of gendered language and gendered socialization.

Chapter 9

“YOU LOOK LIKE A MACHITO!”

Gendered cultural practices in the context of sport

In the previous chapter, three themes were revealed when analyzing who is participating, and why female participants have been able to go against local social norms – escaping violence, alternative gender roles in the family, and seeking opportunity. Also exposed was the colonial double-bind imposed by SDP that delimits these young women. This chapter will build on chapter 8 by further exploring the complex social elements that constrain girls’ participation in Chévere and Bacano. To reveal how people negotiate meanings in and among their specific community of practice, I begin by briefly and superficially explaining the gendered nature of the Spanish language (a site for gender negotiation) and how it underpins habitus, specifically machismo. Considering the connection between language, communication and action, I then explore gendered language in relation to gender-based restrictions learned and reproduced through childhood socialization. Questioning how these restrictions – though difficult to measure – may constrain female participation in SDP and in sport. By giving consideration to normative expressions and local histories, I strive to answer the question, "what differences do gender and sexuality make?"

The weight of language

Drawing from feminist linguists, Messner (2009) argues “language is a powerful element of social life—it not only reflects social realities such as gender divisions of labor, it also

helps to construct our notions of what is normal and what is an aberration” (p. 58). Although teasing linguistic and cultural factors apart is extremely difficult, research does suggest language may influence thinking, especially memory and categorization (Sera, Berge & del Castillo Pintado, 1994) and the human experience (i.e., space, time, causality and relationships) (Boroditsky, 2011). In interviews and casual conversation, gendered labels became a common topic when discussing barriers for girls to participate in sport. For this reason, I explored the gendered nature of Colombian Spanish before exploring derogatory words associated with female athletes.

Like one-quarter of the world’s languages, Spanish nouns are grammatically gendered since they are preceded by a gendered article. For example, doll is *la muñeca*, “la” is a feminine article; and truck, *el camión*, is masculine, defined by “el” as the masculine article. Segregation in the Spanish language goes further to metaphorically absorb women. When masculine identifiers are applied to represent both men and women, the invisibility of girls and women becomes standard. For example, if any number of women are in a room, they are addressed in the plural word for women, “*ellas*”; however, if a single man enters and joins those women, the pronoun changes to a male-associated term, “*ellos*,” meaning men. The “universal” masculine erases women from text; therefore, in public policy and history, women do not exist (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 480). This is the same with the terms children (*niños*) and footballers (*futbolistas*). Interlocutor Adelaida, who will be further introduced in chapters 10 and 11, noted female invisibility is not reserved to language alone but extends into social interaction:

Here women are invisible, you listen to a radio program and men talk as if there were no women listening to the radio; it affects you! That is my analysis but it is very easy to see. You listen to a program on the radio, they are talking about some subject and they never take into account that there are women listening; you read some article and many times it is directed only to men, advertising... (Professional athlete, Bogotá, Adelaida)

The foundational argument of this chapter is that through rudimentary routine language, girls and women are rendered invisible and subordinate to men. Therefore, it is relevant to consider that from the onset of verbal communication, Colombian Spanish speakers are negotiating the world, their place in it and their actions through a gendered lens that tends to uphold biological determinism. This normalized practice reinforces and reproduces the coloniality of gender.

Hegemonic machismo

Early in each interview, as a gentle icebreaker, I asked participants to describe a Colombian girl and boy in three words. Older adults mostly said girls and boys are the same – “they are just children!” – but noted the ideal woman is “delicate.” When probed further about gendered treatment and rules, some said girls need more protection, but most argued girls and boys are treated equally and both are capable.

Valentina, a female participant in Chévere whose embodiment blurs masculinity and femininity, did not take time to consider what I may have been looking for in my questions. Her interview was an inconvenience, taking up her personal time in the office,

time she wanted to use to scan her Facebook page, which she did simultaneously. She softly complained, “are we almost done?” in a rushed tone throughout the interview. But her responses were telling. “How would you describe a Colombian girl?” I asked. “Brave, daring, adventurous” she said, pausing before mentioning the word “fighter” while not breaking her trance with the screen. “And a boy?” She responded: “Machista, coward, but fine!” Recognizing my opportunity to enter into deeper conversation, I asked: “What is machista?” She clarified the term:

Machista is a person who... [pause for reflection] It is a man, more than that, it is someone who sees everything in men and everything is for men and women don't have the right, and in the case of football, football is full of machismo. At the foundation, we try to play mixed [gender] and by doing so everything is better.
(Participant, Chévere, Valentina)

Valentina's response is significant because I casually asked for three words to describe a girl and a boy, and yet it immediately led us into Colombia's hegemonic masculinity, characterized by male chauvinism (Viveros Vigoya, 2016).⁷²

Viviana, a shopkeeper in Chévere responded similarly, but substituted men for boys in her response: “men are more machismo.” Machismo, a ubiquitous term applied to Latin American social research, is understood as masculine strength related to pride (Gutmann & Viveros, 2005; Reference withheld). There is no single definition, but it is alluded to as a term to signify sexism and male dominance and is linked to physical,

⁷² Other points of interest include how she would later tell me she is more interested in spending time with boys than girls, which is ironic considering how she describes boys as uniform machista. And, that she perceives her participation in mixed-gender football to be improving gender relations in her community.

symbolic, and structural violence (Viveros-Vigoya, 2016). Below, this generic and omnipresent term, machismo, and its application within the social processes of constraining girls' participation at VIDA, will be explored through the voices and observations of research participants.

Language \longleftrightarrow labels

The first time I interviewed Lourdes, a previous participant introduced in chapter 8, she told me labels like *marimacha* were an issue of the past; however, the second time we sat down, her sentiments changed. Sitting with our backs to the fence at the upper corner of the field and eating candy, she said girls who play sports continue to be called *marimacha* and that this label is “very macho and very rude.” When asked how female participants are treated by community members, she responded confidently, “some young people say tomboy or they shout lesbian because she plays football. Yes? But they do not know. I think that we don't have to pay attention to those words. My life is to play.”

Gabriela, another female participant in Chévere, had viewpoint similar to Lourdes, noting young women should not let others' words and judgments affect them. Sitting in the office, I asked her about labels she hears. “*Marimachos*. All my life, I think and for time before that too. But here at the foundation, I have not heard men say that, not with that word.” I asked her what these names mean to her. “They are offensive to us and obviously we do not feel comfortable,” she explained with the understanding we were referring to female participants. “Do you think there are girls who want to play football but do not play because they these words to them?” I asked. “No” she responded, “It is not something that hinders us from playing, besides that is our decision. If all the girls in

this sector played, then I do not think that we would have the same stigma. The families also persuade girls to not play.”

Yuliza, another Chévere participant introduced in Chapter 8, started playing at a young age in the street. When she began playing, she was labeled *marimacho*, which she defined as “a person who has the body of a woman but has the soul of a man.” As she finished her statement, she blurted out defensively: “But not now, *now* [girls playing] is normal!” I asked how she perceives these words.⁷³ In this moment, her positive sentiments about social change stopped and she spoke in a stream of consciousness:

Well, when the girls are called them, it makes them feel bad - playing football is normal for men and women - but over time this is diminishing and that word is no longer heard. Well, they used to say them [derogatory words] to hurt women, for example they say *marimacha* and you're normal because you know that you're not a *marimcha*, so you start to argue.

⁷³ Yuliza also taught me that among groups of friends some derogatory slang words, such as *marrica*, which means fag, gay or pussy, are used as terms of endearment. This was also heard in conversations with groups in their teens and twenties. Findings in Fulcher's (2017) study in Australia revealed that participants viewed homophobia and homophobic language as largely unrelated, with homophobic language being labelled ‘offensive language.’ Numerous studies indicate that homophobic language may be used to reinforce masculine gender norms. One small-scale U.S. study with 191 male and female eighth-grade students indicated that gay-related name-calling was not influenced by the target's sexual orientation (Poteat & Espelage, 2005). Name-calling was, however, directed more frequently toward someone the students did not like than toward friends. However, in a study in Norway, a higher proportion of male adolescents reported having called a friend gay-related names, as opposed to someone they did not like (Slaatten et al., 2014).

Sandra Milena, a participant from Bacano who will be discussed further in chapter 10, echoed Yuliza's sentiments: "The girls who play, marimacha, machorras, *you look like a machito!*" she said, imitating those who mock her.⁷⁴

In contrast, statements from male participants living in Chévere did not align with female participants' stories. They uniformly stated they did not know the derogatory words to which I referred. It would be foolish, however, to think these young men do not know these words. But it is understandable that they were actively trying to avoid being associated with them while to some extent representing VIDA as "good citizens" in an interview. The young women did argue that inside the VIDA community of practice they do not hear derogatory labels.

Unlike the male participants in Chévere, male participants in Bacano appeared to be more aware of gender-based issues and spoke openly about them. Diego, a leader in Bacano introduced in chapter 7, ended every statement with a big smile while fluttering his long eyelashes. He was humble, relatable and on many occasions, I saw him make a room full of VIDA parents laugh with positive humor. He was also socially aware of social inequalities stemming from the hegemonic gender hierarchy and open to discussing what he observed. When asked what challenges female footballers encounter, Diego said: "There are many obstacles in the aspects of which girls are excluded, they are verbally assaulted, many say *don't do it, it's for men, you think you're a man?*" I asked Diego if it is common to hear the term machorra, and he said: "I heard it more previously but even now it is heard." When discussing negative labels, he noted that he calls female

⁷⁴ Although these derogatory slang words felt extremely familiar in my vocabulary (consider that I am not a native speaker, so slang words were predominantly learned at the research locations), I do not recall and have zero notes demonstrating female participants being labelled with derogatory words – tomboy, lesbian, dyke. So my engagement with these words is derived from formal interviews and casual discussion alone.

participants by name, before continuing to highlight that he addresses players by professional names too (intended as a compliment), and he listed a few famous male athletes' names:

There are people who throw expressions [around] that are not suitable for women and if you do not like the girl you can say that she is "machorra"... but in a situation when the person is talented, she is compared with Messi, with Ronaldinho, with Cristiano Ronaldo, with high-performance players who have demonstrated a good development at the football level. (Participant, Bacano, Diego)

Sandra Milena corroborated Diego's statements, emphasizing in her interview that once she reached the competitive state team (and therefore recently leaving VIDA), people stopped labeling her with insults and stopped questioning her sexuality. Confusingly, despite complaining about labels and stigma, female participants denied the weight of negative labeling discrediting that it may constrain girls and young women from participating in VIDA. However, throughout this research, the close relationship between gendered language, gendered socialization, stigma and girls' participation, continuously entered conversation. This connection will be discussed below.

Gendered language ↔ gendered socialization

In her work, Forero-Peña (2015) addresses how childhood gendered socialization in Colombia encourages boys to objectify and abuse women as a part of their masculine

identity. Viveros Vigoya (2016b) also explores this issue but with an added complexity as she delves into social class and racial-ethnic positioning with relation to masculinities, arguing that Colombia's liberal multiculturalist model for eliminating Afro-Colombian social inequalities is inadequate. On a rainy day on the upper field in Chévere, I saw gendered socialization as explained by Forero-Peña and Viveros Vigoya in action. While half-heartedly refereeing children (ages 8-10) playing a handball game, I sat on the sideline and took notes:

One boy stubbed his finger. He took a break to recover. Another boy asked, "why aren't you playing?" The boy with the injured finger responded that he needed a break. The other boy said, "you're a girl!" This was said in a condescending way and could have been exchanged for the comment, *you're a loser!* I asked the boy to repeat to me what had been said. He did. I asked the injured boy what this meant to him, he got up and ran back on the field. (Field notes, Chévere, May)

I continued to write:

Two girls are sitting beside me. I asked why they stopped playing and they said because the boys won't pass to them. Then I asked if they had brothers here. Both said yes. One has three, the other, one. I asked why aren't more girls here. They said that at the other concha [previous field] many girls played. They think maybe

girls don't know the route to get here or don't want to walk up the hill. (Field notes, Chévere, May)

These notes reflect everyday social processes that demonstrate a direct connection between language and action. The boy is hurt (i.e., weak), so he is then compared to a girl who is assumed to be weaker and less capable than boys. He finds this insulting, resents the label and despite being in pain, he returns onto the field in a sprint, to prove that indeed he is not a "girl." At the same time, the girls are not being valued as equals on the field by their peers and are casually omitted from participation. The young girls assume this interaction is normal, shrug off their disappointment, and continue to play segregated from the boys. Incidents of this nature are not isolated to VIDA, but research suggests they are commonplace in sport (Anderson, 2008, 2009; Messner, 2009). They demonstrate how micro-aggressions connect language to action and a normative social exclusion of girls, women, and men who do not conform to heteronormative standards.

Another example took place when VIDA's staff was attending a week-long conference and I was left as the adult in charge of the Chévere office. On one rainy day in Chévere, blaring music competed with raindrops, and water began to flood the caged court that overlooks the neighborhood. A dog lapped circles around laughing children who pulled cotton hoods over their heads as they kicked a football through puddles. Valentina and Felipe, two youth leaders, reasoned that penalty kicks would end the game and then we would all run for cover. Eighteen boys and two girls momentarily resisted with smiles before complying and lining up.

A few weeks before, Valentina led a football practice on another field in Chévere – a field where the coach felt uncomfortable because of “gangs, lack of community trust, and more machismo” (Staff Member, Chévere, Julio). That day, Valentina entered through the fence gate, closing it behind her. The teenage boys stopped and waited for her signal. In her mature husky voice, she commanded their attention, asking them to line up and warm-up. In her interview, her authority and confidence had transformed into contextually radical statements: “if we have children we could not abandon them. Not like the men, the men have a baby and they leave them. They just say goodbye. We do not, we always stay there.” Valentina’s history included not attending school for extended periods to support her family by selling candy on the street. Although none of the interlocutors had sheltered childhoods, Valentina’s solemn responses red-flagged her explicit experiences with institutionalized racism.

In his interview, Felipe refused to acknowledge common terms used to stigmatize female participants such as tomboy, butch, and dyke, indignantly saying he did not want to be associated as a man who uses those terms. He argued that girls are included and equal in all aspects of his life, and that his participation in the organization had changed him: “if they played, I played, but it was not the same as it is now [in VIDA] where the boys will say, *I want that girl for my team*. Before, everyone said girls don’t play football.”

As the rain persisted, Felipe, Valentina, and a handful of young men and I ran down a steep hill toward the office, dodging growling dogs. I unlocked the door and raced to turn off the alarm. The group stumbled into the entrance. Recognizing that Valentina and I were the only women in the office, I imitated the young men’s posture

and actions. Cold and wet, we sat around a table swapping laughs. Felipe, speaking in full vibrato said, “Valentina, *make* us coffee.” Without question, she complied. We drank coffee as Valentina proceeded to mop the muddy floors. The young men sat relaxed at the table and made jokes until it was time to go to school, never once acknowledging Valentina or her efforts. Once alone, I asked Felipe why he told Valentina to make everyone coffee. Without hesitation, he said “she’s a woman, it’s her role” (Field notes, Chévere, June).

These two examples demonstrate the normalized gendered processes of socialization occurring on and off the football field at VIDA. In this setting, a hegemonic social hierarchy is reproduced in action, re-establishing and reproducing the coloniality of gender. When I addressed these situations with Julio (a VIDA employee referenced throughout this research) he did not engage extensively in conversation, but shrugged it off, defensively suggesting he cannot control every situation. Considering that most days he managed 50 or more children alone, I did not judge his disregard for the situation, since he was born into a 500-year-old system. However, I did question the normalization of these gendered interactions and the children’s processes of socialization that revealed internalized oppressions and coloniality. Next I will explore how boys are also socially excluded due to gender-based socialization and where girls are ordered in this colonially-derived and Catholic-influenced gender-based hierarchy.

Can boys play with dolls?

Before I began conducting interviews, I asked staff members to read through my questions. In Chévere, staff member, Gloria Laura wanted me to reverse my focus and

ask if boys could play with dolls. For most interlocutors in Chévere, the question was novel and antiquated. For example, participants Felipe, Yuliza and Cesi responded “yes” without hesitation and motioned for me to go to the next question. Laura, an entrepreneur in her 50s and aunt of a female participant, also thought the question was erroneous and silly:

It is nothing! For example, “oh, look at that gentleman in a pink shirt!” They look elegant. Now I have seen footballers in fuchsia! And for men, what do they have? It does not mean anything because the person is one thing and the clothes are another, right!?! (Entrepreneur, Chévere, Laura)

And mother, Lizeth, was also in agreement. When her young son and VIDA participant overheard her answer, he yelled and giggled “I like to play with Barbieeees!” I then asked her if a boy could have played with Barbie fifteen years ago. She hesitated and refrained from giving a complete response, “Well, I think that’s where I would think...” Paloma, a local social worker not associated with VIDA linked the question to previous labels and social roles:

Of course! Because we say there has been influence. That is why I tell you that before we saw a lot of machismo because before the boys could only play with cars and the girls with dolls, and now that has changed because the boys play with dolls and no one says he’s a different gender or he’ll become homosexual, nothing! There is no problem. And also, role-play helps them. When they grow up

and suddenly they are a man, they are better with babies because they have played with dolls as a little boy, yes? As he is already sensitized a little more. In the case of the girls, they already play with cars and it is no longer that it's for boys, so a little difference has been removed between woman and man, and with that, responsibilities are more egalitarian. (Social worker, Chévere, Paloma)

Men were more reluctant in their responses. For example, while sitting in the backseat of his sedan, Sebastian, a local taxi driver in his 60s, and I discussed how his attitude has changed on the subject, "Well, I think that what happened is that in my youth it was frowned upon, at least a boy who was seen playing with a doll was wrong. But I have realized that, that is not bad, the same a girl who plays with a car can play with a doll." "But now?" I probed. "That's why I say, now I do not see anything wrong, previously I saw something bad." I asked him what has changed between then and now. "What changed? Well as I say, I do not see anything wrong with both the boy and the girl who play with objects of both boys and girls, I think that is normal for them." I sum up his response with a question, "So, your mentality changed?" He responds with ease, "yes." "Why?" I ask, in search of concrete examples. A long pause enters the conversation and creates a space between us, we both start to feel awkward in the silence. I feel anxious about potentially making him feel uncomfortable. "It's not easy," I said. Accepting the unknown, he responds "No, it's not easy, I don't know why!"

Julio, a VIDA employee, was not certain of his opinion and found himself stumbling in his response, "It depends" he said before continuing:

Well, there are boys' games that are not considered for girls, I do not know, wait, I remember ... Well, I do not know! Boy's and girl's role play *dad and mom with the little ones* and then there are boys who do not like those games. It's more of a girl's game than other games, but with other ages, if I consider it, then yes.

Jaime, a teenager who dates a female participant, but emphatically does not like football explained how boys playing with dolls may be interpreted by the Chévere community:

It can be seen as wrong, but I do not think that it is wrong. If there is actually something wrong, then, yes, of course! But that boys play with something of a girl, it is not very normal for us here and the parents always worry. It is normal for girls to play with things from boys, but from boys to girls, No! From girls to boys, yes! (Military student, Chévere, Jaime)

As we think about Jaime's innocuous statement we see that from the community perspective outside VIDA, it is not ideal for a girl to participate in a masculine-labeled pursuit (i.e., football), however, it is much worse for a boy to engage with actions associated with femininity (i.e., Barbie). When responding to this question, adult male interlocutors (over the age of 30) in Chévere were less comfortable than female interlocutors (of all ages) and displayed confusion. Potentially, they hesitated in fear of judgment, but they did engage with the question. This was not the case in Bacano, however.

In Bacano, the clear answer from community members Brayan (man, 20s), Carolina Herrera (woman, 60s) and Patricia (woman, 40s), was “no” and furthermore, “don’t go there.” Regardless of age or gender, the response was that it is inappropriate for boys to play with girl’s toys. Cristina, a student social worker, explained the issue at hand: “Precisely because of the macho culture here, if someone sees a boy with a doll, they start to discriminate, to push away or to disturb in a certain way.” VIDA employee Liliana made a similar statement:

Even these imaginary games reflect gender. The girl is the one that cleans the toilet, the one that has to cook. It has been difficult to break that scheme because it still continues at present. I’ll give you a practical example. A boy cannot play with a doll and a girl cannot play with a car, because one is a game for girls and the other only for boys. These beliefs and traditions come from generation to generation and are totally cultural, the grandparents raised the parents, who raised children and they are raising the grandchildren. (Staff member, Bacano, Liliana)

Terrance, a community member who spends his days at the senior citizens center, provided an example for Liliana’s argument: “My grandchildren play all the time, the boys and the girl. I have only one granddaughter, she likes sports a lot, just like her mother, the boy too. I’m going to enroll him [in VIDA] because he likes football.” Noting that he only mentioned enrolling his grandson at VIDA, I asked, “But can boys can play with girls’ things?” To which he responded unequivocally:

No, no no no! I do not share that, although it happens, but the girl is a girl and the boy is a boy. How can a girl and a boy play with the same toys? Although if they do, it is because they are children. The ones I see doing that play chocoritos⁷⁵ and also do sports together. This is something that is not paid much attention to because everything is the same today, women doing the same things as men, the labors are the same. (Community elder, Bacano, Terrance)

Francisco, the oldest interlocutor in his 80s, and Mafe, another regular at the senior center, were ambivalent about change. Francisco said, “if they can, it’s handicrafts or cooking,” whereas Mafe noted “I do not know, modernism has yet to enter here.”

Interlocutors’ responses, particularly those in Bacano, such as Terrance, reflected ideas of binary gender that reveal the coloniality of gender. In hindsight, this question about gendered games and toys was pivotal as it provided me with insight into how gender relations in Chévere and Bacano have and have not changed since VIDA’s inception. These conversations provided examples of how machismo varies depending on the individual and community, while demonstrating that social change occurs differently in each household and community of practice. Girls remain subordinate in both locations. These responses revealed how opinions have been shaped by many factors – personal experience, family, friends at VIDA, community, television/Internet – and separating one from another may be impossible. A critical take-away from these responses is that gendered boundaries, learned through socialization and reproduced through generations, directly shape how individuals understand masculinity and femininity, and how

⁷⁵ Chocorito is a Costeño slang term that refers to girl’s toys, specifically cooking toys. It can also be a label for a woman who is not a virgin.

individuals perform gender and develop social standards. These examples begin to illuminate the connection between negative labeling, micro aggression, and the reproduction of gender roles. It is the next topic.

Connecting the dots to girls' (constrained) participation

While we sat in a doctor's waiting room, Bacano VIDA employee, Liliana, who often half-jokingly proclaimed "I'm so tired of gender talk," analyzed how gendered toys and games transfer into the social stigma that surrounds participation in sport and VIDA:

In all sports, I feel stigma. This is for men and this is for women. Because you see that most of those who practice rollerblading on the coast are girls. It even seems strange for men to skate at all because they consider it to be feminine, more *rose-like*. I think this is changing a little, but it continues to be an issue. That is why I strongly support gender equity. (Staff member, Bacano, Liliana)

What can be drawn from Liliana's statement and the question of childhood gender-based games and toys explored above, are that gendered rules do not end with childhood but become habitus and are reproduced.

I addressed the question of connection between language, stigma and participation with leader, Diego, asking if he thought gendered labels constrained girls' participation. In a convoluted way, he answered yes: "There should be many girls who may want to participate in these activities but are not linked in the processes [of playing, in order] to avoid such comments that are exclusive." When asked the same question, Jhon, a father

and volunteer in his late 20s, noted the stigma that surrounds girls' participation that shapes the restrictions parents determine for their children:

There are girls who suddenly like football but do not play because the father says *I do not like you to play football!* because they have already seen that girls sometimes become lesbians. The parents have this in mind: *My girl will not play for such reason!* (VIDA volunteer and parent, Bacano, Jhon)

Is this the majority of parents or a minority in Bacano, I asked. "The majority," he said without hesitation.

Sitting in his living room with a fan blasting in our faces, Victor told me he was tired because he drives a truck at night and did so the previous night. His son participates in VIDA, but his daughter does not.⁷⁶ When discussing stigma, he included social class differences in his response, highlighting education levels:

The stigmatizations are there, *machorra* or *machito*. Oh, of course! It is very frequent to hear the word when a girl plays. They say *hembra*, but adding a masculine pronoun and female termination as an insult. They say lesbian, but society does it innocently because it was a sport for men and now the woman is practicing it. Then [when] they see her, they think [she] is a man but they do it out

⁷⁶ This was a particularly interesting interview because while Victor was espousing that men and women are equal, he yelled to his wife to come collect the plates from the table. Men roamed in and out of the house, while his daughter stood a few feet away behind the kitchen counter eagerly listening but refusing to speak. An Afro-Colombian man in his late 20s entered the interview and without question sat down and began speaking over everyone. I stopped to address him, requested consent and explained the topic of inquiry. He responded, what about racism? For the first and only time in my research someone explicitly questioned racism. He drew comparisons of sexism and racism, but the interview was cut short by a motorcycle crash outside the house.

of ignorance because they do not have a clear concept of things. What happens is that in this sector, one is very lacking in study and for this you have to reach a good academic level, so that also derives the concept that women can also practice football. (Truck driver and father of male participant, Bacano, Victor)

The interview suddenly ended as everyone in the room ran to the barred but open windows upon hearing loud sounds of a motorcycle crashing.

A Bacano community member not associated with VIDA, Reginald, noted in terms of derogatory language and girls and women's' participation in sport that change is happening, but that there are many "stumbling blocks" and "contradictions" along the way:

We have had cases where gentlemen have stopped and insulted the girls, saying *This is not for you, you serve for cooking and for washing, to iron, this is for males!* But we do not share that idea and every day we are demonstrating that women have the ability to develop any activity just like men, they are the same. (Laborer, Bacano, Reginald)

My observations and interviews revealed that in regard to language use within VIDA, teenagers and adults did not use derogatory words towards girls and young women. VIDA's community of practice is limited to what I identify as the VIDA bubble. The bubble consists of participants and their direct kin. My few interactions with teenage boys not enrolled with the program, therefore outside the bubble, in Chévere, were in contrast,

uncomfortable.⁷⁷ On multiple occasions, I immediately felt disempowered (Field notes, Chévere, May). However, I do not doubt my interlocutors' claims that language within and outside VIDA is different.

In this chapter, I questioned how language, gender-based socialization and VIDA's processes of socialization as a community of practice may shape how community members understand gender difference and may constrain girls' participation. I also addressed how community members are engaging in the reproduction and resistance of gendered sport. Colonial residue was apparent in both the gendered nature of activities (e.g., sports, toys) and with the display of normative homophobia. While interlocutors recognized positive steps forward in terms of girls' social acceptance playing sports, there are critical limitations to this, such as verbal denigration, family restrictions, and a normative shallow interpretation of equality that does not consider equity.⁷⁸ Chapter 10 builds on the topics of gendered language and gendered socialization to answer questions about female participants' identity and representation. Here I will explore how young women participating in VIDA are negotiating gender.

⁷⁷ I had few interactions with young men in Bacano outside VIDA due to my security protocol.

⁷⁸ In Bacano, Liliana, worked to create a girl's kickball group while I was there. The group started strong with approximately 15 girls, but a few weeks later, it fizzled. One key takeaway was the sheer inequity occurring and Liliana's lack of resources to correct it. The girls did not own appropriate footwear (or sports bras) and had swapped shoes among themselves so they had one foot with a running style shoe for kicking and another with a Jelly or flip flop. A few of the girls who played kickball also played football and their hand/eye coordination was remarkably more advanced.

Chapter 10

AMBIVALENT FEMININITY

Spectacular femininity and gender performativity

For decades, gender scholars have been calling for a deeper understanding of the Colombian gender order, which is needed to combat the shallow and problematic discourse that renders women as passive agents. Women's passivity and invisibility appears to be visually countered by women who engage in the process of beautification. When discussing my research with an academic who identifies as a radical feminist in Bogotá, she remarked about the normalcy and extent of women performing femininity through embodiment:

A woman must do three things: wear makeup and have long hair, wear tight clothes and heels, and most importantly, always be trying to make herself more beautiful. Will we ever have a female footballer more famous than Miss Universe? (Field notes, September)

Rodriguez (2001) reveals this standard in her writing too, with an article that begins with a statement from a taxi driver alluding to the fact that no one will give her a ride because she is not wearing a mini-skirt. Another example was uncovered in an interview with previous professional footballer, Adelaida, who told the story of being required to mail coaches photos of herself before being allowed to try-out for the team. She continued to

explain that athletes are required to beautify themselves in accordance to heteronormative standards, at the risk of not being selected to play.

There is sparse research addressing the idea of beautification in Colombia, with exception of academics Ochoa (2011), Giraldo (2015, 2016ab), Stanfield (2013), and Forero-Peña (2015), in addition to journalist Silvana Paternostro (1999, 2011). Paternostro's (1999) riveting book *In the Land of God and Man: Confronting our Sexual Culture* explores the subordination of women through her personal experience, family, and work. She ultimately blames the spread of AIDS in Colombia on men's sexual philandering coupled with inadequate sexual health education. Her argument is upheld by academic research on health and sexuality in Colombia (Reference withheld; Reference withheld). Paternostro's book resulted in remarks of praise for illuminating Colombia's machismo culture and the havoc of its reign. Contrastingly, it also drew criticisms accusing her of betraying Latino men and Latina women, and becoming a traitor to Colombia (see, O'Connor, 1999). Her writing reveals a grim reality about Colombia's gender relations that had long been sequestered, and exposes the gravity of publicly discussing the issue. More than a decade later, she wrote an article *Drug Busts* for *The Atlantic Magazine* (2011). In this article, she searched for a non-padded bra in Bogotá. She could not find one, and this underscored how narco-beauty standards had infiltrated the life of every young Colombian woman. In a chapter addressing beauty, female identity and body image in Colombia, Forero-Peña (2015) builds on Paternostro's efforts. Practices of extreme femininity (e.g., narco-estetica), Forero-Peña argues, have become a method of survival for many women in popular classes. Stanfield (2013) backs the same argument: "The masculine beast is the alter ego and engaged partner of feminine beauty

in Colombia. That beast represents many of the historical and structural problems unresolved in the nation..." (p. 2). Forero-Peña (2015), Stanfield (2013) and Paternostro (1999) link idealized beauty and gender relations to larger institutions of power, organized by men (i.e. Catholic Church and the drug cartels); institutions that women cannot challenge and can only enter from a subordinate role.

Because of narco-traffickers' and *traquetos*' love for the *mamacita* coupled with the idealized spectacularly feminine neoliberal postfeminist "modern" woman, Colombia is now an international hotspot for aesthetic plastic surgery.⁷⁹ Forero-Peña (2015) argues that as women from low-socio economic neighborhoods try to improve their lives, or perhaps, survive, they find beautification in the form of plastic surgery and/or body manipulation. A woman's body became her instrument for improving her status or surviving. The women who become visible through their appearance alone, attempting to improve their class status are the *mamacitas*. Becoming visible or "being in the spotlight" became a "feature of the contemporary postfeminist regime" (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 136). The reality remained that the spectacularization of femininity did not transform power, but allowed certain women to be more valued by men in power (Skeggs, 1997).

Forero-Peña (2015) emphasizes that the mainstay stereotype of Colombian women in the media (i.e., Gloria in *Modern Family*) is what Ochoa (2011) argues is the idealized woman: she has "large breasts, a thin abdomen, and large firm buttocks and legs" (p. 344). In her research, Giraldo (2016b) confirms the legacy of the spectacularly feminine Colombian trope, arguing: "Sexual desirability and compliance with self-

⁷⁹ Traqueto is a term applied for an associate within the illicit substance industry. Mamacita, which translates to little mama, is understood as a hot/sexy young woman or more colloquially as "hot babe."

sexualisation delimit the 21st-century Colombian female subject, one that is good and young looking, fit, refined, luminous..." (p. 122).

The narco-estetica of women being voluptuous has been married with the American and European racialized image of beautiful women being "blonde, tall and hav[ing] light eyes," resulting in Colombian women's participation in extreme bodily practices (Ochoa, 2011, p. 344). In urban locales, where public messaging concerning health and beauty are contradictory, it is commonplace for young women to have breast implants, buttock augmentation, and/or rhinoplasty. Many receive these surgeries from their parents as 18th birthday presents. This image of the idealized spectacularly feminine woman is so normative that advertisements sell plastic surgery as a means to improve teenagers' "low self-esteem" (Ochoa, 2011, p. 352).

Although I am athletically-slim, have blonde hair and blue eyes – meeting the criteria for many Western beauty standards – I continually experienced the social pressures of being expected to make an effort toward unachievable beauty standards.⁸⁰ At both locations and for different reasons at each, I felt the pressure of being watched and judged by men. For example, in Bacano I received constant cat-calls when walking in

⁸⁰ The airport was small, but comfortable; there were a few food stalls and shops. Relaxed, I walked to the check-in counter. *Buen dia, Senora. Voy a Bogotá, por favor*, I said. The woman responded with a smile. I immediately noticed her immaculate hair, painted nails, and perfectly ironed uniform. *Si, gracias. Senorita, puedo ver su identificacion?* Upon request, I handed her my passport. I've been in this situation hundreds if not thousands of times and the next question was routine. Was I carrying firearms or explosives? *No senora, gracias*. But the final question, *Y seniorita Oxford, cual cirugías ha tenido usted durante su estancia?* I looked up. My thoughts stopped and I second-guessed myself. Did she just ask me about surgery? I laughed at the confusion as one does, when not speaking in her native tongue. Searching for an alternative word, and unable to find one, I repeated her question. Did you just ask me what surgeries I have had during my stay? *Si*, yes, she smiled. I continued in confusion, what do you mean and *por que?* Without hesitation, she motioned with her arm and eyes for me to look around the room. *Seniorita Oxford*, many women with means travel here for plastic surgery, I just wanted to notify the staff in case you needed extra support during your travel today. I looked around the room to see many women with bandages on their light skinned faces. Oh, plastic surgery? No, that's not why I am here, but thank you for your concern. (Personal Journal, July)

public, so much so that by month six I had completely tuned them out (Field notes, Bacano, September). Another example includes an experience when I was interrogated by a public bus driver who stopped the bus to ask, “why are you dressed like a man?” because I was wearing shorts, a t-shirt, and running shoes (Field notes, Bacano, August).⁸¹

The image of the spectacularly feminine Colombian woman is a curious paring with the asexual Mary that Colombian girls are to epitomize. The process of becoming a woman is a particularly difficult negotiation since it can be dangerous (in terms of sexual risk and physical manipulation) and conflicting. In this analogy, the coloniality of gender is exposed, as the good “Mary” and bad “Eve” dichotomy is built around religion and social class, plus race and ethnicity. For example, non-white women, and especially black women, are eroticized and simultaneously seen to be untrustworthy (Giraldo, 2015). Colombian stereotypes personify the coloniality of gender as they frame (and limit) men as violent and machismo and women as spectacularly feminine (and lighter skinned and heterosexual). Drawing from participants in Chévere and Bacano, the narratives below provide insight into the complications and nuances of identity for female participants and how they are situated within the spectacularly feminine narrative. This chapter seeks to unpack the confusing paradox of girls’ participation in SDP in Colombia, demonstrating how female participants negotiate their presence as footballers in spaces that do not outright accept them as such.

⁸¹ The bus in Bacano was always an adventure for gender inquiry. After the quick resolution of this confrontation, the bus driver’s tone quickly changed into excitement and he asked me if I knew Culture Club’s “Karma Chameleon.” In glee, he proceeded to blast it through the speakers and we sang together in hysterics until I exited the bus.

Beauty, sexuality and female participants

Colombia hosts more beauty pageants than any other country in the world (BBC calculates more than 10 per day). On a Friday night in the city near Bacano, I had the opportunity to watch one unfold on the steps of the Catholic Church outside my apartment. Young women in their early teens, draped in revealing cocktail dresses, gently wobbled on four to five inch heels on top of the undulating stone steps. They had perfectly coifed hair and painted-on lips. Their smiles and hands, resting firmly on their hips, did not waver as they waited nervously to be judged. The judgment of these contestants' beauty was customary Friday night entertainment. Onlookers sitting in familial groups in lawn chairs drank beer, ate ice cream and also waited anxiously for the man in a suit to announce results through the microphone (Field notes, Bacano, September).

Femininity and gender roles are stricter in Bacano than in Chévere. This may be one of many reasons why girls' participation at VIDA is extremely low. As previously addressed, female athletes (and therefore VIDA participants) are frequently labeled with terms identified as derogatory in Colombia (and much of Latin America) such as tomboy and lesbian. One of my first interviews was with Adelaida, a woman in her 40s, who can be considered a pioneer of women's football in Colombia. Adelaida has played professionally in South America.⁸² Drawing from her experience as a Colombian woman who openly identifies as gay, she discussed homophobia and how female athletes are stigmatized, "In my time, all you had to do was simply say you liked football [as a woman] and it was [assumed] to be a sign, you are already gay, or you will be gay soon."

⁸² Considering the lack of infrastructure in women's football, the term "professional" is loosely interpreted.

I asked, “and here is that bad?” Her expression identified my naïve response and she rhetorically questioned, “and here is that bad?” She continued, “Whether you are or not, [the label] is an offense. Nowadays a girl can go out with her bride by the hand, obviously, I go back and I repeat there will be someone who does not like it.” Highlighting the double bind that girls can find themselves in when trying to play football and prove heterosexuality, she rushed through a lifetime of examples in a quick statement:

It's super complicated, a man has a very easy life because all the pathways are open (without consequences) ...From the start, it's the parents who are the ones that differentiate that a man is this and a woman cannot do this, the man can do what he wants to do, whatever he wants! Until she hits him, he can do whatever! For the woman it is not like this, it is always because *What will they say?* Not because they have the conviction but only because *What will they say, outside?* Then there's the fact that if she likes football, she's gay, *what a pity she's gay!* It's an outside stigma. No, imagine that everything influences you from the outside. They want to rape you, they want to fuck you! The outside, they tell you that you are lesbian and [for your safety] you need to pretend that you are not. So, then you have to be with this man, the coach who says, *Well, show me you're not a lesbian!* Then come with me, then you're pregnant, you cannot study. Do you understand me? It's a lot of [pause] nothing [pause] You're trapped! (Professional player, Adelaida)

Although the magistrates of the constitutional court legalized marriage equality in 2016, Colombia's conservative population, 90 percent of whom identify as Catholic, condemn homosexuality (Moreno, Herazo, Oviedo, & Campo-Arias, 2015). Identifying as gay, lesbian, or anywhere on the sexual spectrum outside of the heteronormative standard can result in social exclusion, ostracism, and even death.⁸³ Examples below describe how defending one's femininity and heterosexuality becomes an everyday act for VIDA's female participants.

Sandra Milena and Valentina

Sandra Milena has played football in Bacano for most of her life. She giggled and tossed her long thick hair back and forth with her hand as we spoke. But as she addressed stereotypes and stigmas surrounding her participation, her giggle turned into frustration:

Well, when I began to play it was something strange. I mean, I said to other people, *I play football* and they answered me, *do you play football? I mean like what! You are a girl.* They would also say, *you were beautiful when you were little.* So, it was something strange. When I told my friends, they were like, *you play football?* Sometimes, when I went to play with the girls at school, they wouldn't choose me for anything, it was something a little bit weird. Now, the women are starting to change their thinking. (Participant, Bacano, Sandra Milena)

⁸³ To hear Colombian citizens who identify as LGBT speak about their experiences, watch these short documentaries directed by Emmanuelle Schick Garcia and produced by JPS Films and La Casita de Godot : <https://youtu.be/jIwPTY2C8w>

Without a prompt from me and in a defensive manner, she began to address her femininity:

I always have been feminine, and football and my feminine side have always been there. I mean, I have not changed anything. Of course, my physical appearance has changed because now I practice a bit more, but my feminine side has nothing to do with that. (Participant, Bacano, Sandra Milena)

Addressing femininity was less about gender performativity for Sandra Milena, and more about defending her heterosexuality coupled with a subtle condemnation of homosexuality. Sandra Milena stated:

I think some girls [football players] get confused and they change their personalities. So, they think that because you play football, you have to behave in a different way. Some even ended up being attracted to women. Maybe it is because the girls do not have support from their families, so they have really low self-esteem...I have always been like expressive, I mean, always happy. I have never felt the weakness of being alone, and having to submit to these kinds of changes. I think that it is what happens with girls from here.... they become braver because they are playing football, and they adopt a different way to speak. But I think that more than anything these changes are mental. (Participant, Bacano, Sandra Milena)

A focus on physical beauty and heteronormativity exists in Chévere as well, but these topics were less stressed among female participants. However, it was clear that staff members presented themselves very differently from local mothers who dressed in t-shirts, track pants, and running shoes. This difference in gender performativity compels me to question the extent of the entanglement of beautification and socio-economic status, which would be another thesis in its own right. Did these specific local mothers not care about hegemonic feminine rituals? Was this a form of protest? Or, more likely, could they not afford stylish clothes and painting their nails? When performed by and on teenage women's bodies are these acts considered family investments or, perhaps a survival mechanism? The topic of beauty and sport frustrated Valentina, whom I introduced as a Chévere participant in chapter 9. Valentina always presented herself sans makeup and usually with a collared shirt and track pants or jeans:

Well, the thing that happens over time, women don't see the logic in playing a match or a game, we who play are few. The girls currently are thinking about mirrors, physical appearance, one thing or another, makeup. *I used makeup and the handsome boy looked at me*, so they abandon football and they forget about it.

(Participant, Chévere, Valentina)

Valentina's comment is validated by female participation numbers that plummet around age 13. However, the root cause of this decline is unclear as factors beyond self-image, such as neighborhood security and parental supervision (as discussed in chapter 7) also

prevent female teenagers from participating. I was told, VIDA does not ask or record why participants leave.

A ‘delicate’ negotiation

Gabriela, Ana Maria and Lourdes

In almost every interview, the term “delicate” was used to describe the ideal Colombian woman. Female participants, such as Gabriela in Chévere, displayed internal strife in their responses concerning how girls can participate in sport and become an ideal woman. “Well, it is said that the women who do not play football are more delicate but football doesn’t make someone less delicate,” she said in annoyance.

At the same location, Ana Maria did not use delicate to describe women or herself. Sitting on the field in her leather jacket and adorned with red lipstick and hoop earrings, she discussed her ability to play futsal with pride, but confessed pregnancy ended her participation. In her opinion, strong female footballers do not “stop to be a woman,” and they do not consider themselves to be weaker than men or to act in a weak manner.

Well I think that all girls are equal. The thing is that some girls are more delicate. There are a lot of girls who think that it is only for men, so they are not playing because they think it is a rough game, *but NO!* All girls are equal, but the ones who play, change a little bit, because they play strong, without stopping to be a woman, it is normal! (Previous participant, Chévere, Ana Maria)

She then broadened the conversation to consider the local socio-cultural context and the role of women within it, “you need more care with the girls, and usually the men don’t pay the same attention as the women. Why? I do not know. Because the men are men and the women have more danger.”

Lourdes, who also stopped participating due to pregnancy a few years ago, has experienced the danger that Ana Maria addressed. As noted in chapter 8, she began playing football in Chévere to escape her abusive father. Before she joined VIDA, she played in the street and received regular insults:

My first experience was really hard. I was five years old. At that time, I had some obstacles, so I decide to play with boys, and one day when we were playing at the front of my house and we were playing with a ball, we just created the football pitch with some rocks, two goals. They called me ‘marimacha’...I felt bad because I felt strange, but afterwards I did not care about anything. In the end, I did not pay attention to what they said. I even dressed regularly in track pants. I never liked to wear skirts, which is another reason the people called me marimacha. Sometimes I fought with the boys because they treated women differently, and I have never agreed with men treating women with disrespect. (Previous participant, Chévere, Lourdes)

Three years later Lourdes observed VIDA cleaning and organizing the public football field near her home and then she watched children playing. She joined and more than a decade later, she discussed the physical differences between girls who participate in

VIDA and girls who do not. "The girls who play have a good level of resistance. They run faster, they catch the ball faster. The girls who do not play are more delicate. They do not kick the ball well."

Ana Maria took Lourdes' point of physical resistance further into mental strength and being okay with performing in typically identified masculine ways:

The girls who play, they called them marimachos, machorras. They say that you look like a man. For example, the coach says to us: 'When you are in the football pitch you have to stop being a woman. I mean you should have a more aggressive attitude so that you do not lose the ball, but when you leave here, you then continue being yourself.' But some people say that you are butch, that you look like a man, so sometimes they treat us like that. (Previous participant, Chévere, Ana Maria)

The striking element of Ana Maria's quotation is the concept of negotiating when she is to be a woman, as if participating in football requires one to momentarily change her gender. She did not question this negotiation but took it in stride as common sense. A staff member in Bacano, Jhon, made a similar statement, "I always say to the girls playing football, you have to play like men – if he grabs, you grab, if he kicks hard, you kick hard, but off the field you have to behave like normal, like women who are ladies." Jhon's words demonstrate that even within VIDA's safe environment, female participants must negotiate their gender performance throughout the day to adhere to local social standards.

Yuliza, a participant at Chévere, introduced in chapter 8, revealed how gendered comments and double-standards are understood and self-vindicated, “No, we are equal. If not, it is just because we are ladies. Outside football we are equal, but while we are playing, maybe we receive a hit, or a kick, but the rest of time we are equal.” This common notion, expressed by Yuliza, reveals how young women participating at VIDA have internalized and embodied gender subordination and are engaging with the coloniality of gender consciously and subconsciously. Through this research, I want to illustrate the (sometimes) subtle yet important differences between the transformation of specific individuals and real social change. Through young women’s voices, the challenges in measuring and defining gender equality are highlighted below.

Daniela, Yuliza, Valentina and Lourdes

Despite being told by society that they are different and regularly receiving discriminatory labels (outside of the VIDA community), female participants presented themselves with confidence and regularly argued that everyone is equal (As demonstrated above, there were caveats and double standards to “equality”). Daniela, a youth leader at Bacano, introduced in chapter 8 as someone who leads practices and exudes a calm and quiet confidence, noted:

At least for me personally, I have demonstrated to men that it’s not just them who can play, but we can play as well. And that now it won’t just be one person, but two, and we are a team. So, in that way we are equal, we are all equal.
(Participant, Bacano, Daniela)

Yuliza also hinted at social change in her interview, although I question the extent of this perceived change when considering what is “normal”:

Well, in the past, before I joined [VIDA], I played in my neighborhood with my neighbors, and they said to me that I am a “parajo macho” (discriminatory term referring to her being masculine). After I joined [VIDA], they treated us, the women, normally. (Participant, Chévere, Yuliza)

Valentina argued the road to transformation through girls’ participation in the program is not easy, but that it is worth it because progress has been made as far as the mentality of the individual female participant changing her expectations, but also in terms of community consciousness and the perception of female participants. She explained:

The selfishness of men changes; the machismo changes; basically everything changes because women start to have other thoughts and other expectations of sport. They start to think that it is not only for the men. And that sports are for having fun. *Maybe* it is to have a nice time, to integrate yourself, to get together with others. Women start to see that. You as a woman start to see all the things and the good things that you can do, because you sometimes say *ah! What’s the point?* But when you are playing you say *No! It is valuable!* The football is everything because you meet new friends, new people, and new things. You learn

so many things playing football. And positive things! (Participant, Chévere, Valentina)

Lourdes also associated her participation with her development of confidence, strength, and resistance to gender norms. She demonstrated this when she shoulder-punched a man who had pushed against her on the bus (Field notes, Chévere, June). When discussing the differences between girls who play and those who do not, she said “We are brave. We are purposeful. We do not care what they say to us, we keep moving forward” (Previous Participant, Chévere, Lourdes).

The role these young women play is complex. Through their lived experiences of playing football, it is evident that they feel and observe inequity, but due to the social forces that shape their lives, they accept it as normal. In chapter 10, I shared examples to explore what I identify as ambivalent femininity being performed by the young women interviewed. These examples help show how female participants negotiate their presence as footballers in spaces that do not outright accept them as such. Next, with examples of resistance, concepts of social change (over time), and through alternative perspectives, I explore processes of social change that are related to girls' and young women's participation at VIDA.

Chapter 11

PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Everyday negotiations and resistance

It was afternoon in Chévere, and only one girl arrived on the field to play. She was 5 or 6 years old and petite. Since the field transfer, Julio had been organizing participants by size, which usually translated to children under 11 playing together and children over 12 playing together. On busy days, a third grouping was created. On this day, there were few children and even fewer under age 11. Julio told her she could not participate because she was too small, insinuating she would get hurt; she was upset. In physical protest, she refused to leave the field. She shadowed me, holding my hand and gripped it as hard as she could every time I ran towards the ball. Julio gave the boys variant rules, and repeatedly yelled “be careful playing with the girls” and “kick it smoothly/gently.” Remembering the feelings of being that petite girl at one time in my life and being told I was too small/fragile to play, I became angry and I purposefully went in for a hard tackle. Writing in my field notes about the situation, I questioned, 1) Is this sexist? 2) Or, is it necessary in a place where girls are known as delicate and often abused by men to say “hey, be less aggressive?” (Field notes, Chévere, May). I introduce this field observation not to condemn Julio as a person who could be perceived to be machista (again) or to answer the questions I raised in my notes. I bring it up to highlight the complexity of negotiating gender within these circumstances.

In this research, interviews were conducted with young adults and adults, but many observations at VIDA included children. Frequently, observations contradicted

what were seemingly progressive interview responses about the trajectory of girl's participation in SDP (and sport in general) in Colombia. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) argue social change and "power relations derive from such conversational exchanges and their place in community practice" and it is important to highlight these negotiations in action, such as the interaction between the young boys and girls and Valentina and Felipe highlighted in the latter half of chapter 9 (p. 483). The next chapter will tease out the tensions between observed actions and interlocutors' perceptions of change, to answer; *What processes of social change involving female participants and VIDA may transform gender relations? How and to what extent do they engender change?*

The passing of time and the slow creation of a new normal

Social change in this research may metaphorically be one step forward, one step back and on some days, a step to the side. It is a constant non-linear negotiation influenced by various intersubjective relations. For this reason, it means different things to different people and people become aware of social justice issues at different moments. For example, women interlocutors who were older than 30 noted a mental shift after seeing girls play and having the rare opportunity to play themselves. These experiences were powerful for their personal outlook:

The female [sport] has changed in my life. I have not had the experience of playing or of it being my favorite sport, but in terms of [personal] thinking, [girls playing football] has helped me to be much more open. I come from a very

traditional family where the dolls are for the girls and cars and balls are for boys, so socially it was not accepted that a girl played football, because it was already badly cataloged as a tomboy thing. It was different when I had my first experience. I was surprised by the sensations of the feelings that awoke in me, that I was aggressive!...As for gender relations, we always know that men are always a little stronger, more macho and women are a little more submissive, more gentle, more subtle, that is the difference that supposedly socially is established and [through sport] girls have lost that softness and sweetness that characterizes them. (Chévere, employee, Gloria Laura)

In contrast, leader Diego's experiences are not embodied like Gloria Laura's. For this reason, he believed seeing female athletes in the media shaped his thoughts. He extended this thinking to a shift in the Bacano community's perception of women's sport in general:

There have been changes in the improvement of play, previously girls football was not given the importance. People said, *women are going to practice*. But with training they have advanced and time has passed, and women have been showcased in the media demonstrating their talent. Women have also been linked to many independent clubs and foundations with women's teams. I say it has served gender equality well because previously we lived in a macho culture where women were not allowed to play sports, some aspects maybe skating, but not football as it was a male sport. (Participant, Bacano, Diego)

Previous professional footballer, Adelaida, learned about discrimination through first-hand experiences, but she agreed with Diego's sentiments:

They have changed a lot! It's a new opportunity they did not have. It was like a paradox, they put football on their eyes on television, they talk about that, the father ... and now there are many parents proud to play and take her to play, they take her to play, especially men. Look at this funny situation. [It's the] man, the father is the one that allows his daughter to play, the father, let's say that the father is the friend who supports her from a young age. (Professional player, Adelaida)

When asked about their childhoods, community members over the age of 30 in Chévere like Adelaida, were quick to note a “before and after” period in terms of access and acceptance of girls' participation in sport that ranged between ten and twenty years. Before, was when girls could not play, and after, as in current time, when girls (not necessarily women) can. The reasons girls were restricted from playing ten to twenty years ago were many. Interlocutors' responses drawing from personal experiences, which connect social stigma to restriction from play twenty or more years ago, will be examined next.

Gloria Laura, a VIDA employee in Chévere, addressed gendered labels, stigma and gendered options for leisure that she remembered from her childhood:

Girls who played football or those who rode bicycles and worked on bicycles were considered tomboys. I had an experience with a friend, she was my university practice director. Her personality was big, strong and she loved to ride bicycles and skateboard. Her father said she was a marimacha and she always had many problems and she told us *I had to go to a psychologist because my parents believed that I had a different inclination* (referencing homosexuality). So socially, sport was characteristic for boys and girls could do stuff like dancing, modeling... that has changed a lot. (Staff member, Chévere, Gloria Laura)

Lorena, another employee in Chévere, had a similar story:

When I was a girl I had opportunities to play but few to play football! We played other things because football for women was not possible or you were labeled a tomboy, lesbian. I am [30s] years old now, so this [change] is in my lifetime. When I was a girl it looked very bad [to play football]. Even now it has not changed that much and women, we could not play football. Although I have an older brother who played, but in environments open to boys and us girls, we played girls' games. (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

And, Chévere Shopkeeper, Viviana, also noted the gendered nature of sport:

A few years ago, it was not so well seen that a girl played football. Now when a girl plays football it is more accepted. For example, when you would go to play

football, your dad said: *is this the ball for the boy or for the girl? It's for the boy!*

(Shopkeeper, Chévere, Viviana)

Examples like these where interlocutors identified a new normal were commonplace.

Sentiments were similar in Bacano, except instead of tomboy and lesbian, the highly offensive term dyke was more common when addressing the past. At the senior citizen center, Carolina Herrera said girls “used to be called machorras, my mother called me machorra because you play ball, they play with men.” She then noted a social change arguing “Now people who want to be football players or who want to practice any art have a lot of validity.” Embarrassed to use derogatory language, Francisco, another member of the senior citizen center said: “At that time in the country they were called machorras because they used to make men's trades, it was brutally said. Forgive me for that expression.” When asked if he thinks those concepts have changed, he responded, “Those expressions are ancient, ancestral things,” crediting education and the university system for dismembering social stigma for girls who play sports.

Although still limited, female athletes are becoming a more common presence on television; and older interlocutors are seeing more girls participate with VIDA on local fields. This has led many to believe (or to try to sell to me) that stigmas and gendered barriers for female athletes are an issue of the past. Obviously as demonstrated in prior chapters, this is not so. As previously noted and explored through the lived experiences drawn from female participants, social change is disarrayed. The fact that girls and young women are participating in programs like VIDA does not erase years of stigma, stereotypes, and heteronormative standards connected to the coloniality of

gender; nor does their participation minimize these social oppressions in their current state. As seen throughout this thesis, female participants (e.g., Lourdes, Yuliza and Sandra Milena) are balancing a role of pushing the boundaries of hegemonic femininity while ignoring personal confrontations. For their safety and in order to continue to play, they must compromise when necessary and be defiant when possible.

Through the words of adult interlocutors who never or rarely played, like Gloria Laura and Lorena, it is clear that labels and stigma constrained their participation. Through Viviana's comments, the prevalence of these stigmas is illuminated. But it is also clear through the low numbers of female participants at VIDA in Chévere in 2015 and through discussions with participants, that derogatory labels for some, do not carry the restrictions they once did. Now in Bacano, labels continue be harsher and more commonly used, and female participation rates are extremely low. The responses indicate that interlocutors' perceptions of social change were influenced by women physically playing and/or watching girls or women play via local interaction or through the television/Internet. The extent to which these actions are transforming gender relations in the community is limited to specific individuals (bubble) versus a marked quantifiable change (society).

Limitations of social change

In the context of VIDA, gender is constantly being negotiated in terms of individual action and communal perception. This was noted in Sandra Milena's comment regarding a condescending statement that she was beautiful as a little girl and hinting that playing football had removed her beauty; and with Gabriela's personal conviction of wanting to

be delicate and a football player (chapter 10). It was cemented by the numerous double standards interjected into interviews conducted with people who simultaneously support and undermine female participants. Community members who noted they admire female participants' strength, and would not let their own daughters play are examples of this (chapter 9).

Throughout this research, female participants appeared to be able to minimize the impact of social persecution by ignoring or confronting derogatory labels. This may be because they loved playing, their support from the VIDA community, or because their families are also challenging the mold. The majority of female participants interviewed came from either single-parent (mother) families who had endorsed female participation, or families supported by the mother working outside the home by necessity. In both situations, gender roles had been questioned and disrupted in the home, to some extent. Many participants, especially in Bacano, participated for economic benefits (e.g., school support) and paid little attention to stigma outside of ensuring their security. Survival trumps social denigration.

Although participants did not identify their participation as any form of civic demonstration, their daily actions revealed they were participating in implicit feminism. For example, they actively occupy previously male-dominated spaces and perform previously male-only roles. The majority of female participants were not personally invested in the *narco-estetica* image, with the exception of select images posted on occasion on their private social media pages showing red glossy lips. Even with implicit

resistance, these young women remain constrained by powerful historical structures and institutionalized social systems.⁸⁴

The young women's voices in this research demonstrated that binary gender roles are being challenged by female participants. This was done in subtle and sometimes more overt ways with varying degrees of success and often widespread tensions and contradictions. This was observed in the story of Valentina and Felipe, two youth leaders in Chévere who are simultaneously re-working and reproducing traditional ideas about gender as they navigate early adulthood (Chapter 9). Their interaction demonstrated the ease with which gender roles are enacted and reproduced, while simultaneously reflecting and reinforcing the macro social structures that shaped them. Although there is no question that these participants fundamentally believe in equality, they validated that performing equality is extremely complex. Through Valentina, we also learned that even though her words (chapter 10) and many of her actions reveal an ambivalence towards traditional femininity, she remains bound by the structures that pre-dated her birth and continue to shape society.

The young women interviewed, first highlighted class as their identifiable social injustice. After discussion and reflection, they addressed gender – draped by a dogmatic idea of equality for all – as a valid concern. This may be due to a brief lived experience. These interlocutors are only entering their adulthood and daily stressors may not permit time for extended macro social reflection. It could also reflect not having the opportunity to experience cultures outside of their community or, a lack of interest about engaging in

⁸⁴ Power, in the structural context, continues to be held and (re)organized by white men located at the top of the pyramid in the zone of being who are rarely held accountable to the law because they establish the law; and the patriarchal social systems are reproduced white men at the top but also by non-white men in the zone of non-being, who endorse customary law through normative physical violence.

this taboo topic with a stranger. For whatever reason, the entanglement between class and gender, among other social oppressions such as hegemonic heterosexuality was apparent. The intrusion of VIDA's values such as equality without contextual reflection could be another influencer. Although female participants continue to face stigma and structural barriers, the participants' words show that some critical reflection about the words used to denigrate female athletes and the barriers they face is occurring. We also see a reproduction of the coloniality of gender with binaries explicit and hierarchies gendered. Change in these terms is messy and difficult to measure. To gain a broader picture of girls' participation in sport, perspectives stemming from people outside of VIDA are examined next.

Alternative perspectives

Adelaida

After discussing my research with a taxi driver for 20 minutes while in traffic, he pulled over and told me I had arrived at my destination. When I asked for the fare fee, he thanked me profusely for my research and refused payment. Surprised, I exited the cab and walked across a bridge to the university campus. Students were actively walking in and out of class and I stopped a group to ask for directions. When I arrived at the stadium, I took notes as I watched a women's amateur football match. The stadium was large with a track separating the grey concrete bleachers from the field. The sound of a band practicing nearby infiltrated the space, with upbeat music fading in and out. Young women casually entered the field with their uniforms on. Many wore their perfectly coifed long hair down their back without a hair band and fidgeted with their faces and

jewelry. The interest of the many light-skinned and few mestizo players in their physical presentation before a game surprised me at the time. Now I recognize these physical gestures as ways they can publicly prove their heterosexual status and investment in spectacular femininity. I appeared to be the only active supporter at the game.

After the whistle blew, the girls went straight to their bags to retrieve their hair brushes and jewelry. A few (assumed to be) boyfriends arrived and kicked the football while the girls prepared their bags to leave. The young women exited in a physical state of half athlete (sweaty uniform) and half feminine goddess (hair and makeup perfected).

After the match, I walked with Adelaida (the previous professional footballer, who has been referenced throughout this research) to a local café. She knew I was a football player and after our introduction she immediately noted my blonde hair and freshly painted pink fingernails commenting with a kind, yet sarcastic tone “oh, look at your nails and hair, they’ll accept you!” “They” meant Colombians and “accept you” referenced the assumption that I’m heterosexual. I told her that my finger nails were intentionally pink because I did not know how people would respond to me wearing sports clothes all the time in Chévere and I was copying what local women “do” to themselves to fit in. Adelaida accepted my explanation. Then she informed me that she is gay and “out.” While in Colombia five people shared their same-sex sexual orientation with me, but Adelaida was the only one who was neither ashamed of nor hiding her sexuality.

What began as a few questions in a café turned into a five-hour debrief in the restaurant down the street. In our mutual state of excitement about sharing our stories of gender discrimination in sport, she spoke quickly, as if she could not get all the stories

out in time. When I explained my observations of VIDA, she noted that what VIDA has accomplished, although flawed, is not easy. Referencing the middle and upper classes, and the professional system, she said:

The challenge [in women's football] is to win space. What happens is internal fighting. Sometimes they fight as an example. Colombians fight, one fights in general against the society because they are sensitive to the men's [professional team] selection. *Why do they not take us [women]? Why they do not interview us [women]? ... They want all the recognition.* (Professional player, Adelaida)

While exploring internal fighting among the amateur and soon to be professional women's teams in Colombia was beyond my scope, her point about media representation did strike a chord. While I was in Chévere the 2015 World Cup was being played in Canada and Colombia's women's team was participating and they were a strong team. I searched online and on television for the games and found minimal coverage. I expected VIDA to show the matches and at least discuss them among staff and participants. However, VIDA did not of these things.

The professional men's teams were discussed constantly and the nation literally stopped for their matches. Continuing the discussion about women's football within the middle and upper social classes, Adelaida addressed the concept of psychological space:

Ah! To get space? Yes, if there is [space] but what happens is ... well now I'm going to tell you about internal factors... but within the group there are other

factors that are super strong, good and bad, but groups internally do not allow the access of other girls or are very closed. When you create a group [pause] allowing more *in* is very difficult. (Professional player, Adelaida)

Adelaida demonstrated how Colombia's national infighting and extensive broken trust networks extend into communal social relations, even within a football team. Her comment supported Massey's (1994) argument that "social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism," revealing that "space is an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification" (p. 3). She also identified that there is not a single process that shapes communities to be more accepting of alternative forms of femininity and masculinity, but various avenues and forces that work in tandem and at times, against each other.

Urcela

In a crowded chic restaurant in the city, I sat across from Urcela, a young woman in her mid-twenties who identified herself as class three. She had begun a master's in sociology and gender at a prestigious public Colombian university, but had to stop for financial reasons. Her dark hair and face piercings reflected a personal protest against the spectacularly feminine image that rests in hegemonic contemporary Colombian culture. Her living outside her parent's home as an unmarried woman also signaled that her independent thoughts manifested into actions regardless of others' judgments.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ When I mentioned to my homestay mother that I met Urcela, she immediately and politely condemned her non-conforming way of being.

“I love Chévere,” she said after our introduction. “You’ve been?” I asked, shocked. For the first time in my six months in Colombia I was speaking to someone from the middle class who did not work in Chévere but who had been there, multiple times. Urcela said she loves the ambiance and culture and that so many people live so closely together. She realized in her statement that the people who live there may not feel the same and looked up at me for my response. If coloniality were in her favor, she would probably be conducting this research project, not me. Despite her personal frustration with sport, which began in her middle school physical education – “they made us change into shorts and show our legs, we all hated it” – she has great appreciation for programs that encourage female participation in sport. Urcela also draws from a strong theoretical foundation in gender studies. For example, I had recently returned from Bacano where interlocutors regularly gendered sport (i.e., football for boys, roller skating for girls). Apparently, I gained a bad habit in my interviews because I used Costeño phrasing. In conversation, I mentioned the phrase girl’s sport. Urcela paused and corrected me, asking, “What’s a girl’s sport?” I felt like I had been teleported into another world, which was often the case when crossing class boundaries.

Together we discussed that social change and employing gender equity in sport creates a long messy road. She noted:

I know that the girls are doing something that socially or historically girls did not do, as it was reserved for men. Men are implicated, especially with public space, on the courts, in the neighborhoods...Usually you see a woman in public space and her relationship with space is that it does not belong to her. And people then

believe *I can do with you practically what I want, or tell you what I want*, because the public space is not yours (hers). I feel that [girls playing sport] is a re-appropriation of public space, and that is very cool. They are there and they are admired and observed from another point of view. So, it is not what is sought, but it is what happens. That is to say, they are only there doing something, but the spaces were not always there, or it was not organized to happen [for them] or certain things were given. (Student, Urcela)

Urcela highlights the dynamic process of altering gendered space that is transformed by girls' participation in these programs and how it can be a mechanism to engender social change beyond the idea of physical space. Although Urcela endorses the idea of VIDA including girls and is encouraged by the social processes enacted by this inclusion which drastically contradicts social norms, she alludes to an issue that is void to VIDA and has remained with me from the beginning to the end of analyzing my data: the cultivation of young women's agency in terms of overcoming normative psychological repression and physical participation. We must continually question how much control does VIDA have in terms of socially including girls and young women? How much control do the female participants have in terms of their access to participation? Finally, what can the organization offer girls and young women growing up in volatile spaces if the social inclusion of girls is not an explicit goal?

Section 3 – Conclusion

Chapter 12

ANSWERING THE QUESTION

The SDP movement is rapidly expanding. Organizations are receiving funding from donors on the premise that this is a new and creative frontier of development work. MNCs, government agencies, NGOs, and academics are hopeful that by including young women in the historically male-dominated arena of sport, individuals and communities will redefine young women's possibilities. However, in-depth research looking at the transformations of gender relations within SDP-active communities is minimal. One of the reasons is the infancy of the SDP movement. Through this ethnographic research, I endeavored to fill numerous gaps in the current discourse, such as providing evidence from a mix-gender program; focusing on a cultural context in Latin America; and identifying social changes within micro, meso, and macro social relations. By conducting research concerning gender transformations within this context, I aspired to better understand how social change is created and sustained, with the idea that if we better understand these elements, we can better understand the processes and mechanisms needed to positively transform gender relations.

To conduct this research, I drew from empirical data collected by scholars such as Martha Brady (2005) who argues the benefits girls receive by participating within SDP appear to outweigh the risks; and Martha Saveedra (2009) who notes female participation in gender-sensitive SDP organizations may alter what is "normal" and challenge gender norms. I also followed Lyndsay Hayhurst's research (2011, 2014, 2016), which makes two key points: first, female SDP participants (in Uganda) may challenge gender norms

but at the cost of experiencing emotional abuse; second, she critically questions the role of MNCs within the SDP movement, while calling for more post-colonial feminist methodologies in SDP research. In addition, writing with Darnell (2011), Hayhurst encourages scholars to embrace a decolonizing sporting praxis. I paid particular attention to works by Megan Chawanksy, who with Hayhurst (2015) identifies the “girling” of the SDP movement; with Schlenker (2017) encourages researchers to move beyond the Western ontological positioning of gendered binaries in research; and with Itani (2017) requests more diverse research on the colonial power matrix in contemporary physical culture. Finally, I considered the macropolitics of the SDP movement through Mary McDonald (2015, 2017) who critically examines the neoliberal messaging stemming from the US government and infiltrating SDP agendas.

The repercussions of Colombia’s complex history on social relations illuminated the vital necessity for me to use Grosfoguel’s (2009) intersectional/entanglement theory. I identified institutional racism and paid attention to how class, religion, patriarchy, and heteronormativity shape and constrain individual agency and gender relations. Moreover, the uniqueness of machismo, spectacular femininity, political violence, and gender relations in Colombia required me to move away from Western thinkers. I fell into the borderlines, focusing my attention on Colombian and Latina scholars such as Giraldo (2015, 2016a, b) who considers decolonial feminism to be of critical import when considering current female subjectivity, Viveros Vigoya (2013, 2015, 2016a,b) who explicitly highlights the intersections/entanglements of race, class and gender, and Lugones (2007, 2010) who originally identified the colonality of gender in Latin America and provided a female voice to the decolonial theoretical discourse. After

engaging with these theorists and a few others, I eventually adopted a decolonial feminist framework and an intersectional/entanglement approach. My methods of data collection did not change in this process; however, my intellectual lens and thesis framework were shaped by my fieldwork experiences. Although adopting an intersectional approach felt instant once I began my fieldwork, choosing a decolonial framework evolved gradually as I found authors who relate to and draw from the Latin American socio-cultural context. This made me return to the concept of intersectionality and moved towards the concept of entanglements.⁸⁶

Throughout this research, I wanted to add important perspectives to the gender discourse by listening to voices of community members who have been silenced and reading works by scholars on the academic periphery because of their positioning outside the academic metropole.⁸⁷ I hoped that by exploring gender relations and providing empirical evidence on the topic, a more complex and nuanced understanding of gender relations could lead thinkers to ask, seek and find new ways to progress gender equality. Through this research, I sought to enhance our understandings of the processes and mechanisms that may mitigate gender inequality, in the interest of improving current methods and envisioning alternative methods of combating gender discrimination. Framing this research with decolonial feminism, I endeavored to build on the theoretical decolonial conversation with examples of nuanced lived realities. Exploring the nature of coloniality through relatable, tangible examples in SDP will allow for a broader audience to understand the complexity of history, context and gender relations. It allows us to

⁸⁶ In fact, I published a paper using intersectional feminism and now accept the paper as a maker of how my perspective and theoretical lens has developed throughout my Ph.D. (see, Oxford & McLachlan, 2017).

⁸⁷ Latina theorists and my interlocutors continue to greatly influence my thinking. Thus, I believe the academic community and SDP organizations will also benefit by hearing their perspectives.

properly name the problem of inequality, a requirement if we are to begin to concretely resolve it.

This research began with a handful of questions about girls and young women's participation in SFD programming – to what extent does young women's participation in a traditionally masculine pursuit transform gender relations in the respective SDP-active community? What processes and mechanisms support or deny any potential transformation in social relations? How might communities of practice be shaped by regularly observing girls' play? What aspects of girls' participation could be a sticking point for encouraging social change? And, how are local interactions shaped by national and global shifts in gender relations and vice versa? The answers required exploring powerful historical social structures and social forces that continue to shape and constrain individual agency, and current-day gender relations. It necessitated not prioritizing one social identity over another, while considering gender, class, race and sexual orientation as entanglements and simultaneously problematic to various degrees when looking at diverse social oppressions. Finally, it required listening to a range of diverse voices, in the field and in literature, while regularly reflecting upon my own ontological perspective and position of power.

With the intention of producing an aggregated understanding of social relations, the research question at the fore was strategically categorized into micro, meso, and macro-social relational sub-questions. Micro referred to the individual and immediate family, meso the local community, and macro to national and supranational social structures. Naturally these categories overlap at times. Indicators were translated into key questions, such as: Are female and male participants/athletes treated the same by VIDA,

the community, and society? What kinds of labels are used to address female participants, past and present? What are the social constructions underpinning these labels? Are there specific gender roles and expectations that girls and boys, and men and women fulfill in the community? Have these roles shifted or changed within recent history? Has girls' participation in SDP or women's participation in sport created changes in the community? What role has VIDA played in shaping and constraining gender relations in the community?

As noted above, the processes and mechanisms that shape gender relations in the communities of Chévere and Bacano are implicitly and explicitly shaped by historical and current structures of power. These various bodies and actors are continuously interacting, therefore shaping and constraining each other, social relations in Colombia, and Colombians' socialization and agency. Since it is rare to operate outside of these forces in the "zone of non-being" (Grosfoguel, 2016), any processes and mechanisms that may shape or constrain gender relations in Chévere and Bacano must be considered within the framing of these structural forces.

The young women's voices in this thesis demonstrated that gender roles in Colombia are being challenged by female participants, however, this was done in subtle and sometimes more overt ways to varying degrees of success and often rife with tensions and contradictions. In the pages below, I will conclude this research by highlighting the processes and mechanisms that were revealed to shape and constrain girls and young women's participation in sport and gender relations within these communities.

Processes and mechanisms

Gendered socialization

A critical social process that hinders young women's participation in VIDA and generally in sport, is gendered socialization. Girls' participation in sport (and VIDA) challenges the gendered path defined at birth. Gendered socialization includes, but is not limited to, gendered appearance (e.g., girls need long hair and earrings), childhood games and toys (e.g., dolls for girls), gender roles (e.g., the woman is the homemaker), and gendered space (e.g., the woman occupies private space). These gendered ways of being maintain a gendered social hierarchy that crosses class lines, playing out to various degrees, but ultimately reproducing the colonality of gender as normative. In both locations, it is common for girls to be explicitly restricted from playing sport because of the stereotypes and stigmas connecting sport to masculinity and women's homosexuality.

Oyèwùmí (2002), Lugones (2007) and Connell (2007) argue current day hegemonic gendered social structures are a repercussion of the gendered dynamic of colonialization. An example supporting this argument is Colombia's current day normative gender binaries which were established during colonialism. Leaders and members of the Catholic Church, media/pop culture and many Colombians are actively reproducing these roles and ways of being as normative.⁸⁸ In this system, girls are encouraged to be like heterosexual Mary from the bible, who traditionally strove to maintain her home and to honor to her husband and children above herself. This idealized

⁸⁸ This comment should not be misunderstood. It is assumed that gender binaries and gender roles probably existed in some form pre-contact, but exploring gender roles/relations among numerous indigenous cultures is outside my scope of research. Following the researchers mentioned and building on chapter 2, I argue that the specific roles enacted today in Colombia which subordinate women and non-white peoples were uniformly enforced during Colonialism and continue to be heavily influenced by the Catholic Church.

way of being now includes also being spectacularly feminine, which involves feminine performativity and potentially body manipulation. While women are to be virginal until committed to their husband and are restricted in personal presentation and physical space, men are encouraged to roam, albeit in specific and constrained macho ways that align with power and dominance over women and those who do not identify with (heterosexual) hegemonic masculinity. Men are to occupy public space, be decision makers, and financially support the family.

Colombian power structures have created and reproduced extensive limitations to gender/sexuality that directly constrain girls' participation in sport. Following social protocol, VIDA's female participants are being socialized to be like Mary; however, through participation with VIDA, in a limited fashion, they challenge this notion to be extended. For example, female participants physically use their body in masculine identified ways (e.g., running, kicking) and occupy space previously reserved for boys and men (e.g., public fields). The female participant individually brings to question Mary's social restrictions, and through physical participation, without choice, she creates tension as she begins to challenge idealized femininity as learned through gendered socialization and to display implicit feminist practices.

Although gendered socialization (reproduced as normal over centuries) limits girls' participation, this thesis identified small changes that can be considered a slight transformation in gender relations. These included girls being allowed to play with toys and participate in games that were previously reserved for boys, and some boys in Chévere were allowed to play with dolls. This is a clear shift in thinking and not one that all men in Chévere agreed with; but community members in Chévere, where the VIDA

office has operated for a longer period, were much more open to the idea than those in Bacano.

Once participating, the female participant challenges gender binaries on the field to various degrees, but her role is unlikely to deviate from social protocol. The gendered process of socialization largely challenges any concrete transformation in gender relations connected to girls' participation in VIDA. It contributes to the dismally low numbers of female participants and to girls and boys identifying that sports are to be gendered, and football to be socially reserved for boys and men.

Female participants are beginning to enter into an arena previously reserved for boys and men, but the dominant powers and gendered hierarchies remain intact, limiting and invalidating, steps towards social transformation that seem evident. The restrictions that distinguish what is socially acceptable for girls and boys are being slightly altered, but the overarching social hierarchy that subordinates anyone not identifying as a heterosexual (white) man has not changed. This is clear because boys, by and large, continue to be restricted from doing anything socially associated with femininity. Gendered socialization may be challenged within VIDA, but only by a small cohort in Chévere and to various degrees that do not appear to challenge or disrupt the larger status quo.

Accessing alternative femininity

Due to hegemonic social norms that largely deny girls' and women's participation in sport, in the context of VIDA, gender is constantly being negotiated in terms of individual action and communal perception. By participating in VIDA, female

participants actively consent to publicly contradict gender norms and expectations and engage with an alternative form of being.

Although female participants did not identify their participation as any form of civic demonstration, in many ways, they were participating in an implicit form of feminism in their daily actions. Through their participation with VIDA, it became acceptable for them to dress in clothes typically worn by men (e.g., shorts and t-shirt), to occupy previously male-dominated spaces (e.g., public fields) and to perform previously male-only activities (e.g., play football). This is not to argue that feminism “in action” means acting or being like men, but these participants are physically and emotionally engaging in a way of being and a social space that in recent history (10-20 years ago) would have been nearly impossible. Female participants did not see themselves as different from girls who do not participate in VIDA, but they uniformly discussed benefits of participation that create distinctions such as a social network of friends in VIDA, feeling physically strong, being confident in their physical capabilities, and understanding the rules and therefore the language of sport. They viewed these benefits as cultural currency that gained them visibility, voice and respect within the male social world, where power is held.

Even though female participants were implicitly resisting normative gendered expectations, they remained constrained by macro social systems and patriarchal power structures. An ambivalent performance of femininity and implicit performance of feminism may be effective for micro-level, slow change or even personal value; however, it does not appear to have an impact on the larger patriarchal or class structures at play. If nothing else, the female participants' nuanced and defiant performances of femininity are

making them visible members of society; a place where women are both intentionally and casually omitted.

A constrained bubble

In this research VIDA was the lens for seeing what processes and mechanisms may underpin social change. The question was not solely pinned on the female participants, but I also asked how community members viewed and perceived female participants who regularly performed an alternative form of femininity in public space. VIDA participants posited that progressive change in terms of girls' participation in sport and social acceptance are taking place within the community because they argued: VIDA includes girls, treats them as equals in the office and on the field, teaches boys to respect girls, and trains leaders about local issues. Participants then extended this thought to conclude VIDA had created an improved status in communal gender relations and a weakening of machismo, mostly because they believed their relationships with their peers were less stringent and controlled than relationships among teenagers decades ago. Outside VIDA's community of practice, VIDA's reach appeared limited. Findings revealed that community members who did not directly interact with VIDA did not relate social change in society to girls' and young women's participation at VIDA – rather it was “just” another activity that some girls were starting to “do.” However, many noted more girls are seen playing sports on television and the Internet, which they believed is leading to a broader social acceptance of female athletes.

Inadvertently, VIDA has created a “bubble” or social mechanism, whereby community members fall on the inside or outside in their relationship to VIDA. Even

though VIDA actively works to involve the community and create specific events to encourage community members to join their community of practice, there is an identifiable difference between insiders and outsiders. Inside the VIDA bubble, language choice and the spectrum of masculine and feminine performativity and sexuality is accepted to be more lenient than outside VIDA, yet this is not discussed openly.

VIDA does little to encourage participants to reflect on gender binaries or sexuality. Moreover, there is no gender equity. Rather than identifying that gender norms through centuries have organized specific roles that have constrained girls, VIDA employees argue and teach that everyone is equal. For the girls who make it through VIDA's door, they are provided with a physical and psychological reprieve from everyday life, and a safe space (Brady, 2005; Spaaij and Schulenkorf, 2014). However, VIDA tends to encourage participants to follow values that align with a top-down neoliberal agenda that does not encourage participants to rebel against the colonial power matrix that resulted in them needing to participate, to begin with. Most striking is the fact that the majority of girls and young women in the community face socio-cultural barriers that prevent them from accessing this space to begin with and VIDA does not recognize or make an effort to remedy this.

VIDA is a space free from violence and one that encourages tolerance; however, it is not an escape from, or challenger of, the coloniality of gender. Employees tend to have lighter skin than participants and they work in gendered roles where women occupy the psycho-support roles and men have coaching roles. Staff tends to live outside the neighborhood and have a higher socio-economic standing. The colonial hierarchy is pushed even further when considering that VIDA is dependent upon financial investment

and donations from Colombian and foreign entities of power (e.g., businesses, donors). Although staff members are actively working toward processes of social inclusion (though not explicitly girls' inclusion), because they too have embodied the coloniality of gender, they are reproducing normative idealized behavior for participants to replicate, and not challenging gender relations beyond the exception of "allowing" girls to play (Chawanksy & Schlenker, 2017).

Sport for development and Peace learnings: theory meets praxis

Decolonizing SDP

Sport is a powerful tool historically and is currently used to organize society and populations. The SDP movement is one extension of the larger history playing out in current politics. Although VIDA is a part of a larger narrative, which will be addressed below, its role within Chévere and Bacano should not be devalued or unacknowledged. For participants, VIDA has created a psycho-social safe space where there are few available, which is no simple task. Accessing a regular and consistent reprieve is proven, critical support for participants. Participants acknowledged VIDA staff is considered family, noting they feel love, appreciation, and trust. Many also linked their participation with VIDA to a sense of belonging, purpose and identity. These are significant outcomes for any program, especially this one where participants are experiencing the challenges of adolescence coupled with family trauma, normative violence, and living within a system that subordinates them from birth.

Although participants' responses are monumental for individuals, it is difficult to argue that VIDA is doing anything more than covering a wound with a bandage. The

wound is a repercussion of the disease, coloniality, which is replicated through institutionalized racism and other diverse social oppressions; VIDA is not a cure, but merely a short-term response to numb the pain of one wound, where there are many wounds to be addressed (e.g., health, housing, work/school). VIDA is a symptom (indicator) of a much larger problem – a government and world system that does not care for all of its citizens, but actively maintains a zone of non-being to uphold and reproduce the zone of being (i.e., modern, neoliberal, capitalist society). Criticism of VIDA and the SDP industry is easy to do from the Ivory Tower and a bandage is helpful when a wound is bleeding. It's important to remember SFD and SDP is a temporary answer and should not be considered as a serious solution to social inequities.

I will not argue that VIDA or similar SDP NGOs funding should be cut or operations halted because, a bandage is better than nothing at all, and the safe space and love VIDA's employees provide for many participants is critical. My suggestion is a decolonizing of VIDA and the SDP movement that has developed into a top-down industry, where the local SDP organization is adapting strategies and goals suited to donors rather than working to dismantle the social forces that required their need for operation to begin with (Oxford & Spaaij, 2017). Eliminating the deficit model, where participants are taught to embody values catered towards a Western, neoliberal individualistic and masculine praising society, is a start.

Using the social construct of sport within marginalized communities as the lens in this research adds to the decolonial knowledge base by analyzing how coloniality of gender is present and being reproduced in SDP. The coloniality of gender plays out differently in this research than in other examples. Girls and young women participating

in VIDA are not actively working to be spectacularly feminine, but they are responding to structural forces through the reproduction of gendered socialization and through their everyday rituals that are a response for maintaining their safety and survival. Examples provided in this research include girls' and young women's limited access to participation due to the social stigma connected to female athletes not meeting the definition of "delicate" and being labeled as "lesbians"; gendered space where girls are restricted to their homes because of parents' fear of violence; and female participants confronting gender norms through participation, but in a self-restricted and socially acceptable manner that ultimately sees them fit within the neoliberal agenda and reproduce the gender binary.

To dismantle the reproduction of the coloniality of gender, VIDA and the SDP industry must be decolonized. This is no simple task, but a process – one that I am continuing to undergo myself and will likely do for the rest of my life. All elements of programming from values, language, pedagogies and internal structures to expectations and relations with the donor that influence the SDP organization must be considered. Otherwise, if girls are only allowed to play, how can the organization achieve its goals to engender social inclusion, tolerance and conflict transformation? Ultimately, the SDP industry needs to consider how power is shared within this current arrangement and who is benefiting most – the participants, the government, or the donors?

Recognizing and giving truth to the residues of colonialism that shape and constrain agency and culture today is merely a beginning. Researchers decolonizing their own ontological perspectives is a concomitant task (Connell, 2007; Giraldo, 2016a; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Applying a decolonial feminist framework, although still

imperfect, begins to address the glaring gap between researcher subjectivity, the theories produced by Latina/o academics and the voices and lived experiences of research participants in Chévere and Bacano. Of course, there are tensions, hypocrisy and contradictions within this, but by learning Spanish, working towards decolonizing my own perspective, and drawing from academic and participants' voices located within Latin America, I began to push the SDP conversation in a decolonial direction. To make a dent, decolonial theory must be applied to diverse sociologically grounded research topics, such as SDP and sport, so community leaders, academics and policy makers have a vast array of examples to point to when working to move society forward.

Decolonial theorists have an enormous undertaking ahead of them. The act of decolonizing needs to be accessible and at some point, practical. The most crucial and challenging aspect of decolonial theory is in its application. More researchers need to work toward understanding and analyzing how colonialism is playing out in society today (not just in Colombia) and how these residues can be dismantled for a more just world gender order. This needs to be done through empirically grounded research that can provide concrete examples to be explained outside of academic circles.

Researchers need to totally decolonize society through research, to the extent that society becomes saturated with the concept of decolonialization, but without diluting its meaning, so people can envision the possibility of different ways of being and alternative social systems that do not depend on the marginalization of specific groups of people. To detach from the reproduction of coloniality, people need to become aware of the clear and reinforced imbalances of power, even those that exist within themselves. With ample sociological examples coupled with individual accountability, distinguishing the powers

that have and continue to persuade humans to behave and survive by conforming in systems that reproduce social injustices can be exposed. Only when a critical mass accepts the urgency to decolonize will decolonization become less theoretical and more applicable.

Practical changes

VIDA's efforts to reach out and listen to the community to identify local values and the participants' desires are important. To be a community-serving program and to understand local social pressures, VIDA must continue to build and maintain local relationships and this means discussing their programming with the public and reconsidering the sports they offer. Findings revealed a ubiquitous love for football in discussion; this is unsurprising as it is a national symbol and a sign of Colombian identity. To not love football would make one an outsider in a society where being an outsider is very uncomfortable. However, this research revealed that female participants are not participating in VIDA for football.

Their reasons for participation have little to do with football; their love of football grew as they became confident within that space. In VIDA, girls and young women experience social stigma but they mainly participate to spend time in a psycho-social safe space, to escape violence at home, and to stay occupied. In contrast to Hayhurst's (2011) findings from Uganda revealing that girls participating in SDP are experiencing empowerment but at the risk of personal violence, the data from Colombia does not reveal female participants at VIDA experience violence because of their participation. This finding leads me to question if more opportunities could arise for girls and young

women (and the progress of gender relations) if football – or any gendered sport or activity – was not the central activity. VIDA offered other sports, but as secondary activities to football. If sports not identified with a specific gender were offered, could more girls participate? Could relations/experiences between children and young people in this space be disconnected from the coloniality of gender?

At the end of this thesis, I also cannot argue Brady's (2005) point that the benefits of girls' participation in SDP outweigh the risks because the benefits for individual young women in this research are few and the risks seem many, although they are difficult to measure. In VIDA, girls' involvement is strictly positioned within boys' social privilege and within a masculine-oriented SDP structure (Chawanksy & Schlenker, 2017). It would be interesting to research a community-focused, sport-based program that is radically different from the typical SDP masculine and Western influenced structure (that often includes liberal feminist approaches for girls) to see how it would be received in Colombia. I doubt if it would identify as SFD/SDP programming.

VIDA's approach to (mostly) not divide teams by gender, but by size and ability is a first step toward inclusion. A second and decolonialized step is for VIDA to offer non-gendered sports and games to all participants. By using non-traditional games or sports, participants could make up their own variation. Another option would be to introduce sports like parkour (see, Thorpe & Ahmad, 2015) or ultimate Frisbee (which they were doing in Chévere as a new option when I left) where the participants can re-create sport on their own terms, with gender inclusivity as a required VIDA norm. Allowing children and teenagers to be creative and explore what they do in their free time, in a safe space and on their terms, would encourage them to explore new ways of

living their lives. This is not to argue there should be no structure. I would emphasize that the field staff, especially in Chévere, need more adult support, not less. Arguing that physical play does not need to be what is seen on television in competition (regimented and competitive) but should be fun, experimental and inclusive is another positive step toward spontaneity. Having more trained staff so the adult to child ratios improve could lead to more reflexivity and critical bonding.

Throughout this research, I used the term entanglements to highlight the multiple systems of oppression that systematically punish girls and women (and anyone gender non-conforming). However, men also suffer in this system and to different degrees, as they adopt hegemonic masculinity to prove their manhood, a manhood which ultimately can never be proven. This is often performed on women (and non-conforming men) through violent and dominant exercises. Decolonial feminism does not aim to subjugate non-white men in popular classes as the “other” but strives to look at the complexity and nuance of the coloniality of gender on all peoples – especially those who are not connected to the elite, dominant Spanish-white and imperial actors in power, whose decisions seem to disproportionality affect the lives of people living in neighborhoods like Chévere and Bacano. For this reason, more research on masculinities and how to alter the reproduction of specific forms of masculinity (that hurt everyone) must be placed at the forefront of gender and SDP research and considered an important aspect of SDP gender education. A deep look into the lives of participants identifying as gender non-binary is needed, but may not be possible in VIDA at the moment, due to politics, security and access to those voices. Work of this nature is crucial but needs to be done

with care as it could be dangerous for the researcher and interlocutors, context and culture depending.

If VIDA is serious about wanting to bring about social change and foster social inclusion, they must do more than minimally allow girls to play and dogmatically state that everyone is equal. In a society with evidence of ingrained and explicit sexism, organizations like VIDA must pay close attention to the social barriers that shape and constrain girls' lives. Incorporating gender equity would mean moving beyond "allowing" girls to play but it does not mean jumping on the "empowerment" agenda being pushed by Western donors (Chawanksy & Schlenker, 2017; McDonald, 2015, 2017). A start would be to look at the internal structures and positions in the organization and to hire a broader and more inclusive group of leaders including female coaches and male social workers and psychologists, plus people who are openly gay and gender non-conforming. A more gender-diverse and multicultural staff would better represent the communities where the organization operates and demonstrate to children that gender binaries (and skin color) are social constructions that should not determine work roles. It would also demonstrate that sport is not a strictly masculine space, but one that can be reconstructed to be socially inclusive. Employees should be trained to understand gender inequality as more than a female problem and sexism as more than a subordinate complication undeserving of major attention. Machismo would be considered everyone's problem, not just a problem for those who are not men.

Ultimately, the biggest step in decolonizing VIDA is for those in power to consciously consider who is making the decisions regarding the politics of development and to create some separation from donors who determine what success/progress is from

an outside and self-serving perspective. This political act of decoloniality (i.e., delinking from economic coloniality) would end VIDA's dependency on bodies that connect community programming to hegemonic international platforms without taking deep consideration of local context. This is critical if we seriously want to begin to treat the disease rather than continuing to dress a wound that will only continue to get worse as it currently operates – that is within an economic system that glorifies economic growth and Western identified development (and in this circumstance, tends to focus on children's assimilation into the oppressive modern-colonial imaginary). This appeal sounds overtly righteous, especially considering the plight of the participants and the selfless efforts made by many of the local staff, but this macro-political tension lies at the heart of decolonial thinking as decoloniality “focuses on changing the terms of the conversation and not just its content” (Mignolo, 2012, n.p.).

VIDA operates within environments where local and international politics affect the organization's ability to function. Their current business model relies on funding that requires creating and achieving internal goals that placate donors. Findings revealed tension among VIDA staff in relation to appeasing donor requests. The power dynamics of these relationships and how they shape staff and children's experiences must be more closely monitored. Ideally, VIDA would reconsider the sustainability of their operations in this setting and set boundaries around their operations and goals. Highlighting this tension from an academic position of power is blatantly aggravating as the problem is easy to point out and a solution is seemingly impossible. It is apparent that delinking from donors in this situation may undermine funding and thus eliminate VIDA altogether, which as argued above, is not suggested.

It is my responsibility as a researcher working in the decolonial vein to encourage a re-imagining of our social, economic and political systems and more specifically, of social support programs like VIDA, that do not require participants to “accept being inferior” or to “assimilate” and resign to being a part of a system that has been imposed on them and does not serve them (Mignolo, 2012, n.p.). In an ideal program, participants’ needs (determined by participants) are the central operational goal and the organization should be able to delink from the colonial power matrix without ending their operations. To create gender equality in and outside sport and development practices, we must envision better serving systems, processes and mechanisms and then work toward putting them in place.

Decolonizing SDP needs to be considered with due diligence as this process will look and unfold differently in different contexts. At this point in time, decolonizing feels abstract and finding decolonial movements in action requires searching.⁸⁹ For social change to occur this research suggests an explicit feminist movement which engages a decolonizing perspective is necessary—although this will come with a price and will be difficult to implement. As such, I question to what extent might it be useful to call for SDP practitioners to engage with feminism directly—and make connections, perhaps to insurgent feminism or other forms of grassroots feminisms. This will require sincerely listening to marginalized feminist voices within the research community and academic context, and taking their recommendations seriously.

Although I admittedly have not provided an immediate solution, I believe that exposing the colonality of gender in action and drawing from diverse epistemological

⁸⁹ For an example of decolonizing in action with a focus on economic coloniality, see [La Via Campesina](#) (The Peasants Way), the international peasant’s movement.

perspectives is beneficial. Dismantling more than 500 years of economic, political and social power will require consolidated effort and time, and it will necessitate the re-imagination of the political, social and economic issues.

Final words

This research offers an in-depth understanding of some of the complex and contradictory workings of gender in a sporting context in Colombia, a rather under-researched area within the sociology of sport. It also raises broad and pressing concerns for scholars of gender and sport. Within this Colombian context, the constraints of the broader structure and power systems are quite evident. The empirical data reveal the centrality of gender roles in the lives of young Colombians – to the extent that these gender roles are historically-entrenched, rigid, and hierarchical; and, how individuals (even with good intentions) reproduce and enact gender norms that contradict what they might say about gender in interviews. The tension between the ideal and the real – or the way individuals want the world to be, and the way things are – is powerful within this data. When analyzing and interpreting the data from this study I did not explain this tension as a series of complex, neutral negotiations of contradictory discourses. Instead, I made sure to reveal the effects of power in macro and micro social relations; power that works to constrain and limit the opportunities afforded to girls and young women. Rather than concluding that the macro structures in Colombia are more “powerful” and obvious than in my own local contexts (Australia and USA) it is possible they are easier for me to see because I am an outsider.

The findings of this research confirm that some changes in terms of individual perceptions and self-awareness can be achieved in sport programs, but large-scale social change or transformation is much more difficult to achieve. Feminist analyses of sport should focus on the constructed, fluid aspects of gendered performances. It is pivotal to incorporate those systems (not just their effects) that reproduce inequality and do not offer girls and women the opportunities and rewards afforded to boys and men. To this end, feminist sport research should revisit forms of power that shape but constrain opportunities. This means continuing to look in those places where power (even if in the form of contradictions and tensions) is working to maintain the status quo. If we cannot find it, then perhaps we should invite scholars from the Global South to come and have a look in our Global North backyards.

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